PSYCHD

Living in the shadow of the closet

a discourse analysis of straight partners' constructions of life after a partner's disclosure as lesbian, gay or bisexual

Lyons, Rubian

Award date:
2019

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

Living in the shadow of the closet: a discourse analysis of straight partners' constructions of life after a partner's disclosure as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

By

Rubian Lyons BSc

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of PsychD

Department of Psychology

University of Roehampton

2018

*The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference **PSYC 16/ 216** in the Department of Psychology and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 13.06.16.*

Abstract

This study provides a qualitative investigation of the ways in which people who identify as "straight" within "heterosexually intentioned" relationships in the United Kingdom construct their lives following the disclosure by a partner of a lesbian, gay or bisexual sexuality. Utilising a combination of discursive psychology and critical discursive psychology the analysis focused on both the local organisation of participants' accounts of their experience as the straight partner, and included an exploration of a broader heteronormative context which emerged from the analysis.

The objective of the study was to attempt to fill a gap in current research literature on the topic, by exploring how people "do" management of the disclosure by a spouse or partner as LGB in talk at a local level, and to view the experience of the straight partner in ideological terms, as well as personal, without reducing one to the other. The findings identified that a prominent feature of such talk was a nuanced and complex identity construction: '*establishing innocence*' which was performed by the participants in their accounts. This was comprised of three discrete but intertwined discursive strands: '*constructing a victim identity'; 'a question of knowing'* and *'attributing blame'*. The analysis also illuminated a discursive "*heteronormative thread"* which is woven through all the participants' accounts.

The study extends our knowledge regarding the consequences of a partner's disclosure on participants' constructions of self and identity in the context of existing and newly developed discourses. It has implications for counselling psychology in that the study highlights a complexity at play in the need to acknowledge and address the social justice issues that exist for people who identify as LGB and simultaneously, to be aware of, and sensitive to how this experience may affect heterosexually identifying partners. It further highlights a need for counselling psychology to maintain a reflective awareness of our own therapeutic and research discourses and how we talk in this context.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Director of Studies Dr. Paul Dickerson, and Co-Supervisor, Dr. Jac Hayes. The latter I would for her kindness and support in the earlier days of the thesis and for her interest in, and enthusiasm for this project. The former, I would like to thank for similar reasons, and also for being so generous with his time and wise insights, and finally for his boundless faith in when I struggled to have any for myself.

Massive thanks to my husband Graham, who also had faith – and did absolutely everything else so that I could do this.

Although their belief in my ability to complete this was sometimes scary -it motivated me - so big thanks to all my family and friends. Special mention must go to Dave for his inspiration, and to my cousin Laura for unfailingly touching base with me and keeping me connected to the rest of my life.

Special mention must also go to Tamara, Alex and Niamh, whose friendship has been the unexpected and wonderful bonus of this training.

I would also like to thank my therapist Gary Cook who patiently and compassionately listened and supported me through the wobbly bits over the last four years.

Thank you to the administrator of Straight Partners Anonymous for her support in getting this project off the ground, and finally, and most importantly, to the people who generously gave their time, and shared their stories with me as participants in this study - it was only possible because of you.

Chapter One: Giving context to the research

1.1 Introduction to chapter one

This study explores the experience of people in heterosexually intentioned relationships following the discovery that their partner is lesbian, gay or bisexual. The focus here is on how they construct their identity in this regard both at a local level of interaction and in terms of the ideological discourses that influence their talk. The study will begin in this chapter by introducing the topic, and some provisional definitions will be offered, not only to aid the reader's understanding of terms used by the researcher and the participants - but also to reveal and potentially render accountable - some of the assumptions that may be at work in this study. Some context to the issue will be presented in a brief overview of the literature. The literature will be more fully explored and expanded on in Chapter 2. The researcher's position with regard to the topic will be outlined in a reflective 'box' which is differentiated from the academic content by a blue border. Throughout the thesis the use of this border will signal further reflective sections. Chapter 3 will consider the constructionist methodology that informed this research, while Chapter 4 outlines the particular method used to gather and analyse the data. Chapter 5 details the analysis of transcripts of the interviews with participants, and Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the analysis and offers a brief summary and conclusion.

1.2 Definition of terms

A number of terms are used throughout this thesis to talk about sexual identities and relationships, and some of the most prevalent are defined below in terms of their use here only. However, while the researcher considers this is

important to aid the reader's understanding of how the literature and the participants in this study talk about people, events and ideas, the very term definition needs careful attention. To paraphrase Potter (1996, p.125), "what could be wrong with giving a broad characterisation, offering a compact definition, and then going on to describe these terms in detail?" The problem is that would imply that the terms below can be *neutrally and objectively* described and defined.

The researcher contends that these definitions, like all terms, are historically situated and contextualised, being open to various constructions and to being the subject of debate and argument – rather than being understood as foundational "truths" (Burr, 2003). Instead, these terms are ideologically informed and open to a multiplicity of definitions or hearings that will always influence our understandings. According to Gergen (2001, p. 420) *"*all arguments are subject to multiple forms of deconstruction. All are semiotically spongy, politically and morally saturated, and born of particular cultures at particular locations in history*"*. In addition to this macro, ideological perspective, these terms can also be understood at the micro or local level, that is, in terms of the participants' talk in interaction and the specific interactional issues at hand (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This thesis recognises that in this multiplicity, neither definitions offered here, nor the rich tapestry of identities that can be associated with these descriptions can be narrowed down to fixed a priori understandings (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998).

1.2.1 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual identities and "the closet"

It is noted by the author that the terms Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) do not encompass the range of sexual identities that are available to people and could be read as limiting or essentialist (Wagaman, 2016). The terms Lesbian Gay and Bisexual are used in the context of this study in response to the descriptions and titles offered by the participants in their interviews when talking about people sexually or

romantically attracted to member of the same sex or gender, or to both same and opposite sex or gender (Oxford English Dictionary, OED online, 2018). "Gay" is defined as an American originating slang term for homosexual (OED online, 2018). The term "closet" as used in the title of this thesis, is utilised here to illustrate the complex impacts of the disclosure of a partner's hitherto unknown LGB sexuality on a partner who identifies as heterosexual. It is referred to as: a state of concealment regarding one's homosexuality or any other aspect of one's sexual or gender identity (Oxford English Dictionary, OED online, 2018).

1.2.2 Heterosexual identity

The term is used in this thesis to describe people attracted to a member of the opposite sex or gender only (OED online, 2018). "The 1901 Dorland's Medical Dictionary defined heterosexuality as an abnormal or perverted appetite toward the opposite sex…It wasn't until 1934 that heterosexuality was given the definition that is more familiar today and by the same token constructed as not just '*a*' but '*the' 'normal'* manifestation of sexuality: manifestation of sexual passion for one of the opposite sex; normal sexuality" (Ambrosino, 2017).

1.2.3 Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is a term coined by Warner (1993) and defined as "a concept used to describe how many social institutions and social policies reinforce the belief that human beings fall into two distinct and complementary categories, male and female, and the subsequent belief that those genders ought to fulfil complementary roles, that is among others, that sexual relationships ought to exist only between males and females. To describe a social institution as heteronormative means that it has visible or hidden norms, some of which are viewed as normal only for males and others which are seen as normal only for females. Its purpose, as with

many critical terms, is to help identify voices that have 'fallen through the cracks' and who do not feel that they have an adequate means of expressing themselves within the current social worldview". (Farrell, Gupta, & Queen, 2004, p.185).

1.2.4 Mixed orientation marriage

In the literature reviewed here mixed orientation marriage (MOM) is defined as being "in which one spouse experiences same-sex attraction, and may or may not identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, while the other spouse is heterosexual" (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010, p.334). This is relevant to the current study in that all the participants identified their relationships as mixed orientation in the sense of the definition offered here, although they had not intentionally entered a MOM.

1.2.5 "Straight" partner/spouse

The term "straight" spouse or partner is used throughout this study as it is the term that heterosexually identifying members of both United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) support groups have adopted to describe themselves. The Straight Spouse Network was founded in 1986 in the US by Amity Buxton following disclosure by her husband of twenty-five years of a concealed gay sexuality (Buxton, 1994). According to their website the US network currently receives approximately three to five enquiries daily, while their Face-to-Face Support groups total more than fifty in the US with several in other countries including the UK. Contacts are available for every US state and over ten other countries worldwide.

There are no statistics available for mixed orientation marriages or relationships in the UK, although the existence of support groups for straight partners indicates that the phenomenon exists in the UK too. The participants in this study were recruited from a UK support group, Straight Partners Anonymous (SPA) which

is an autonomous group[1]. The group was begun several years ago as an online website which more recently developed a Facebook page. The group now also organises regular face to face meetings, and there are smaller regional groups within the wider group who also meet regularly for support and social activities. According to the current group administrator the Facebook page allows a more or less twenty-four seven discussion between members, and members report that it has proved a crucial part of their healing experience. The group has developed links to the SSN in both US and Canada; there is also a link with an Indian support group for straight partners. People are referred between these groups according to their needs.

1.2.6 Legal definition of adultery

This is offered as a point of interest for the reader only, as it does not form part of the analysis. The twelve participants in the current study, with the exception of four (one had not been married to her partner and was now separated, and three were considering the options for remaining married at the time of interview), were either divorced or actively engaged in divorce from their partner. While the participants' divorces were not the subject of enquiry in this study it is worth noting that at the time of writing a person cannot divorce a spouse for same-sex adultery as this does not currently exist in UK law[2] (www.gov.uk).

1

Contact email: support@straightpartnersanonymous.com

2

Case law defines adultery as voluntary sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not married to each other but one or both of whom is or are married *(Clarkson v Clarkson (1930) 143 LT 775*). A statutory definition has now been introduced following the MSSCA 2013 coming into force. Part 3(2) of *Schedule 4* to the MSSCA 2013 adds a new *section 1(6)* to the MCA 1973, clarifying that adultery can only be committed between people of the opposite sex.

1.3 Background to the research question

The available research suggests that to date there may have been more than two million heterosexually intentioned marriages in the United States, in which one of the partners later identifies as LGB (Buxton, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). The estimated figure in the existing literature is based on a random survey of sexual behaviour (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels, 1994), and research studies into the percentages of LGB people who self-reported as being in heterosexually intentioned marriages (Auerback & Moser, 1987). Research into this phenomenon was virtually non-existent until approximately thirty years ago according to a recent review of the literature on mixed orientation relationship (MORE) carried out by Vencill and Wiljamaa (2016). Empirical research into the phenomenon is generally lacking, and the research that exists has been conducted almost exclusively in the US (Buxton, 1994, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2011, 2012; Buxton & Firestein, 2007; Duffey, 2006; Grever, 2012; Hernandez, Schwenke & Wilson, 2011). This corpus of research indicates that disclosure in MOREs may occur across race, ethnic group, religion, age and socio-economic levels. Yarhouse and Kays (2010) suggest that people who later disclose as LGB enter heterosexually intentioned marriages for varied and complicated reasons. These include attempting to resolve sexual identity conflicts, entering premature marriage before sexual identity synthesis is reached, as a response to familial or societal expectations, a desire for children, and most commonly cited, love for the heterosexual spouse and a desire for companionship.

A twenty-year review of fifteen empirical studies into the phenomenon concluded that renegotiation of sexuality within a heterosexually intentioned marriage is extremely complex and presents many challenges for both the disclosing partner and the heterosexual partner, and includes issues around finding a network that

accepts and supports both parties as individuals and as a couple (Hernandez, Schwenke & Wilson, 2011). Of the literature considered in this review, only thirty-three per cent utilised theoretical or conceptual frameworks for research or clinical approaches to the issue, which highlights a lack of academic literature for professionals to draw on in approaching this topic.

1.4 Unique issues of straight partners

Buxton (2006c) suggests that a partner's coming out in the context of a marriage and family may occur in three waves. Firstly, the disclosing partner acknowledges their sexual orientation. This identity is then disclosed to, or discovered by, the straight partner who tries to come to terms with this information. Thirdly, any children of the union are told, or guess that one parent is LGB. According to Buxton's (2006c) content analysis of the self-reports of over ten thousand heterosexual spouses there are common challenges for the heterosexually identifying spouse, beginning with shock and confusion, and progressing to include crises of identity and integrity, sexual rejection, challenge to the marriage, concern for any children of the union and a challenge to belief systems, including self-blame and guilt.

With regard to the literature concerning LGB identities, Plummer (2002) suggests that coming out narratives are stories concerned with establishing a sense of self and what place that self may occupy in the world as we experience it. In line with this argument, Buxton (2006b) suggests that husbands and wives who disclose as LGB can find support in LGB communities, while the issues for husbands and wives or partners from the relationship may be displaced to the extent that they go unnoticed and disregarded by society. According to Hernandez et al. (2011) the perspectives of not only spouses, but also parents, in-laws, siblings, and children are

largely missing in the literature on mixed orientation relationships. Buxton (2006c) argues that the heterosexual partner does not initiate the crisis in the relationship, but nor are they intended as a target by the disclosing partner. However, the coming out, or disclosure of an LGB sexuality by the partner appears to result in a sense of powerlessness in the heterosexual partner which exists concurrently with the issues previously mentioned.

1.5 Researcher's relationship to the study

It is suggested by Morrow (2005) that it is usual for qualitative researchers to make their biases, assumptions and worldviews explicit to the reader to aid an understanding of the researcher's stance vis-à-vis the research. To that end then, the following section offers a reflective introduction to the thesis. Throughout the chapters that follow, all similar reflective pieces are marked in similar bordered sections to differentiate them from the academic sections.

I worked in an environment for many years where heterosexuality was not a taken for granted identity and there was, at least an appearance of, widespread acceptance of varying and various sexual identities. Over the years I encountered many people, to be honest mainly men, who identified as gay or bisexual, but had previously been married to a heterosexually identifying person and may have had children within that marriage. Amongst that number there were also men who were still married to women but who were practicing a gay lifestyle and foregrounding a gay identity while at work. I did not think about this other than to be aware that I was glad to work in what I experienced as a "liberal" and accepting environment that empowered people to embrace their identities. While making this statement, I am not

making any *truth claim* about other peoples' attitudes or beliefs in that context, I am reporting a personal experience and my own constructions of that environment.

In that time, I never thought about the heterosexual partners in those relationships; quite frankly they never entered my mind. Many years later a brief social conversation with a woman who had discovered her husband had been living a secret gay lifestyle during their marriage caught my attention and led to us meeting, and my hearing more fully her account of her experience of having had a spouse who was concealing a gay sexuality in a heterosexual marriage unbeknownst to her.

Her story was richly descriptive, peppered with great sadness and loss, but also with humour. I was struck by the lengths to which she had gone to try and understand what her husband's experience was, and her efforts to make their marriage work. One fragment that particularly resounded in my mind was her account of how having finally and painfully broken up with her husband, she was shopping in her local supermarket and bumped into a friend, who said "I hear you and (X) have split up". She replied to the effect that yes, they had, because she had discovered he was gay, and they could not make the marriage work. This woman's response was to immediately say something along the lines of "oh! That must be so difficult for him". No reference was made to how difficult it might be for my acquaintance, nor how she might have been impacted by her husband's issues. In that instance her whole experience was denied, and the focus instead became her husband's experience and his possible distress and difficulties. Hearing this, I felt sad and angry for her, and I wondered how often this happened to partners of people who disclose hitherto undisclosed LGB sexuality in a heterosexually intentioned relationship.

As I progressed through my thesis and people variously enquired about the topic of the study, I was taken back again and again by how in response to my explicit

answer that it was about heterosexual people who had had relationships with people who later disclosed or were discovered to be LGB, the response was always focussed on the LGB partner. People would immediately tell me a story about someone they knew who was once in a heterosexual relationship but now identified as lesbian or gay. The heterosexual partner was without exception, immediately erased from each account. This study is a small attempt to redress that balance. While in no way denying or minimising the difficulties that exist for a person coming to terms with their own sexuality, my interest here is focussed on the people who effectively appear to be collateral damage, or the second victims of their partners' dilemma, but whose own stories are completely overshadowed in the process of their partners' 'coming out'.

1.6 Aim of the study

This study aims to explore how the partners or spouses of people who disclose as LGB are both influenced by - but can also simultaneously create and influence - discourses regarding the disclosure and its consequences. A modified discourse analysis utilising both discursive psychology and critical discursive psychology (outlined in Chapters 3 and 4) was conducted on transcripts of interviews with participants from SPA with the aim of gaining some understanding of how the participants construct their post-disclosure experience at both a local level and a more macro level. The selected methodology allows for a nuanced exploration, as it interrogates how the participants use talk to take up, defend or reject pre-existing and emerging positions and identities. At the same time, it allows for exploration of how these constructions are influenced by the wider discourses on sexuality and intimate relationships that are available to the participants. The objective is to attempt to fill a gap in current research literature on the topic, and to explore how people *report on*

management of the disclosure by a spouse or partner as LGB in interview talk at a local level. A second objective of this study then is to view the experience of the straight partner in ideological terms, as well as personal, without reducing one to the other (Parker, 1998).

Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction to literature review

The previous chapter introduced the topic of this study, which is people's experiences as straight partners. It also presented some literature for context and outlined the researcher's interest in investigating this particular topic. The present chapter continues to explore that corpus of literature and other related and relevant literature. The literature will be presented in three sections. Firstly, some of the literature pertaining to coming out as LGB will be very briefly considered, with the aim of situating the research question. This section will also encompass literature on mixed orientation relationships and the reasons why people who later identify as LGB may enter heterosexually intentioned relationships. A selection of literature around heteronormative discourses and the possible relationship of these discourses to mixed orientation relationships will be also be explored. The second section of the chapter will begin by exploring similarities to other relationship breakdown and possible implications of the disclosure for the straight partners' identity will be considered more fully, including briefly considering how victim identities and accountability are discursively constructed in other literature. The third section will examine possible implications for therapeutic practice and counselling psychology in particular. The chapter will conclude by setting out the research aims of the study.

2.2 Situating the research question and possible associated discourses

2.2.1 Coming out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual

Arguably, most western countries have now made, or are making considerable moves to afford legal rights to people on the basis of their sexual orientation. While the author acknowledges that this is still far from a *utopian* ideal of equality, there is some recent research that suggests that, theoretically at least, equal rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)[3] people are increasingly better supported (Ellis, 2009), and people may be claiming their sexual identities at younger ages (Savin Williams, 2005). Arguably, these changes are enabling people now to have access to increasingly fluid sexual narratives (Hudak & Giammattei, 2014), and potentially a greater freedom to choose their sexuality identity or identities, which could be read as paradoxical in the light of the research illustrating that people still enter heterosexually intentioned relationships, concealing a preferred LGB sexuality (Buxton, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c).

Plummer (2002) suggests that in public discourse, and societally, "coming out" is now more generally viewed as a positive step in the process of being LGB. He further posits that this is reinforced by the narratives that explore the stories and struggles of those who have come out as being ultimately positive. In a review of the literature on the social implications of sexual identity formation and coming out, Mosher (2001) suggests that having multiple identities and perspectives as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual may help to provide multiple levels of acceptance for the process.

[3] The author notes that the issues of people who identify as transgender or transitioning are not addressed in this study as none of these participants reported a relationship with someone who identified as such. Furthermore the author did not wish to conflate that experience with LGB issues in a study of this scope.

He argues that the literature suggests that coming out to other gay, lesbian, and bisexual people may enable the development and maintenance of a positive sense of identity. He further suggests that participation in gay and lesbian organisations and activities may involuntarily disclose sexual identity, but also has the benefit of granting immediate acceptance within the LGB communities. It is outside of the research aims, and beyond the scope of this study to further explore these arguments, but there is a significant body of work available to the interested reader (including Evans & Broido, 1999; Moorhead, 1999; Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999; Yeung & Stombler, 2000).

Coming out of a closet of concealed sexuality may now be considered as liberating on a personal level, however, Spargo (1999) argues that it cannot be separated from the centrality of heterosexuality as the dominant norm, while at the same time possibly further marginalising those who have not disclosed their sexuality (Swan & Benack, 2012). Further to that, Plummer (2002) suggests that the impact and implications of coming out are not limited to the individual, but also seriously affect the people who are close to the disclosing individual. This argument is used by Svab and Kuhar (2014, p.19) who describe coming out in narrative terms as relational, because it affects not just the disclosing individuals but also those they come out to. They propose that the families of disclosing individuals may be thrust into a "family closet" constructed by wider, societal heteronormative influence, and then have to cope with the same secrecy, shame and stigma that affects the individual coming out (Bertone, & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014; Sedgwick, 2008). A discursive development of that argument is illustrated in Broad (2011), who utilised a constructionist approach and standpoint theory to draw attention to a complex coming out process for heterosexual parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-sexual adults, which includes drawing on narratives of heteronormativity to position themselves as both parents and heterosexuals.

2.2.2 Mixed orientation relationships

In a study which surveyed – utilising a thirty item mail survey - ninety heterosexual women in the United States, who unknowingly entered a MORE, Pearcey and Olsen (2009) found that the majority of respondents expressed feelings of anger, resentment and personal unattractiveness following the discovery or disclosure. The study also found that the two most important factors in the participants' decision to enter the relationship related to the treatment they received from these males and the attitudes and values these men initially portrayed. The study found no statistically significant relationship between the participants' level of religious affiliation and their attitudes toward the morality of same-sex partnerships. The quantitative approach of the study did not allow for any clarification or expansion of the participants' responses.

There is some research which suggests that following disclosure some MORE couples remain together. This was examined in Yarhouse, Gow and Davis's (2009) five-year follow up quantitative evaluation of their original longitudinal study of twenty-four mixed orientation couples who had chosen to remain married (Yarhouse, Palowski & Tan, 2003; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006). The findings from the initial study indicated that there are many reasons mixed orientation couples may choose to stay together including, love, commitment and family loyalty. However, at the five-year evaluation, the straight partner rated their happiness as lower than the disclosing spouse. The authors suggest that therapists and counsellors who see these clients should be aware of this disparity and what it might imply for the experience of the straight partner. The study did not examine the disparity in self-reported happiness between the spouses, nor did the quantitative methodology allow for exploration of how the straight partners made sense of the experience – indicating a gap in the literature for a qualitative exploration of the topic.

The more recent review of literature (Vencill & Wiljamaa, 2016) argued for the use of a lens of MORE as a more inclusive framework to explore the phenomenon through rather than the previously used mixed orientation marriage MOM. They argue that utilising a MOM approach to the topic focuses too narrowly on husbands disclosing same-sex attraction to heterosexual wives, with limited research on heterosexual husbands of disclosing wives, and ignoring non-married partnerships and mixed orientation relationships in which sexuality has been disclosed and discussed prior to the relationship. For the purposes of the current study only relationships, married or non-married, that were considered to be heterosexually intentioned by both partners from the outset were explored.

2.2.3 Lesbian gay and bisexual people in heterosexually intentioned relationships

Grever's (2012) exploration of the issues of female straight spouses suggests that gay or bisexual men's decision to enter a heterosexually intentioned marriage, while individual, may be influenced by common forces, which she suggests are present even in today's more inclusive environment. She catalogues six factors to these common forces which include: denial and a lack of awareness of their own sexuality, social and family expectations, professional and economic fears, religious bigotry, fear of violence, and a desire for children or companionship, coupled with love and affection being frequently expressed as a reason for the marriage. Grever further posits that until as a society we learn to value all our citizens' sexualities that gay men will continue to marry straight women. Schwartz (2012) echoes the potential reasons that LGB people may enter heterosexually intentioned marriages; based on her feminist informed family systems approach to working therapeutically with the heterosexual spouse, she suggests a framework for thinking about the issues for both partners in terms of Carter and McGoldrick's (1999) model of vertical and horizontal

flow of stress in the family life cycle. In this model 'vertical' stressors are conceptualised as larger societal issues: sociocultural, political and economic forces, which includes heterosexual marriage. They are further conceptualised as community attitudes to LGB people, including religious communities, and finally as influences within the family of origin and the individual themselves. Horizontal stressors are proposed by Schwartz to be unpredictable developmental and historical events - conceptualised as 'horizontal' stressors or influences. These potential influences were explored variously by Legerski, Harker, Jeppsen, Armstrong, Dehlin, Troutman and Galliher (2017); Wolkomir (2004); and Yarhouse, Gow and Davis (2009).

Buxton (2012) argues that while there is a limited corpus of literature examining the experience of straight wives, the experience of straight husbands is virtually unexplored. Employing a phenomenological methodology, the self-reports of one hundred and eighty-three heterosexually identifying males, collected over a forty-year period, were collected. A content analysis attempted to identify the husbands' main issues, feelings, coping strategies and personal growth following disclosure by their spouses. The findings suggest that the men reported similar issues to those of women in earlier research, with some differences in coping style, including more verbal expressions of anger. There were also some indications that men's feelings of sadness and anxiety were expressed earlier in the process. Buxton suggests that this may be because men grasp the implications of disclosure earlier than women, although a caveat to this study is that these men were not a random sample of the male population in that they identify as straight husbands. While the study suggests that the findings overturn male stereotypes, by illustrating that men seek help from peer support groups amongst other coping strategies, no evidence is offered to suggest that these are non-traditional masculine behaviours. The study does not speculate on the reasons why these women enter heterosexually

intentioned relationships, beyond suggesting that the women reported maternal love and caring by their heterosexual husbands as major factors for remaining in the marriages.

Benack and Swan's (2016) investigation into the academic community's interest in MOM argues that although the empirical research supports the notion of love for the other sex partner as a reason for marriage, this motive is minimised in the sixty six academic works examined for the study, and instead there is an emphasis on the costs and risks of coming out for the LGB partners. They suggest that this distortion is influenced by an essentialist view of sexuality and a romantic and monogamist view of marriage and romantic love that pervades cultural scripts in academic institutions and is largely ignored by researchers. The experience of the straight partner is not addressed in the review, further suggestive of a gap in the academic literature on the topic.

2.2.4 Heteronormative discourses

The term "heteronormativity" was introduced by Warner (1993): and has been suggested as an ideological combination of three separate binaries of family, sexuality and gender (Oswald, Blume & Marks, 2005). Ingraham (2005, p. 4) posits that treating heterosexuality as normative or "taken for granted, naturally occurring and unquestioned" results in a silence around heterosexuality which acts to maintain it as the default dominant position. This maintains an illusion that only non-heterosexual individuals have a sexual orientation and that it is unnecessary to interrogate heterosexuality. Kitzinger (2005, p.255-256) evidences this dominance of a normative heterosexuality in her analysis of data sets from the works of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson as well as other conversation analysts. She identifies a "clamorous heterosexuality" in the corpora in which the speakers "give off" their

heterosexuality as entirely ordinary and taken for granted. This is further interrogated by Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1994) who suggest that although there is a relatively long tradition of social constructionist work on homosexuality, this approach is also valid for the analysis of heterosexuality. Wilkinson and Kitzinger exemplify this use of a social constructionist analysis of heterosexuality in their attention to what they term the coercive "normative" functions and utility of heterosexuality.

Although the emergence of Queer Theory in the early 1990's has begun to offer a challenge to the "naturalising narratives of compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990, p. 146), the lack of talk around naming heterosexuality may act to maintain it as the default position, and that position as one of automatic dominance and superiority. For example, couples and families who are gay or lesbian have to be named as such because otherwise they are invisible. Within heteronormative discourses, heterosexuality and heterosexual forms of relating are considered the norm and are unnamed. This is reflective of Barthes' (1972) notion of *exnomination,* which he argues occurs that particular phenomena are imbued with power when they evade the need for explication due to their taken for granted or naturalised status in available discourses.

The result then of accepting heterosexuality as the social, cultural, and behavioural norm is that this may imply that all other sexual orientations and related practices are treated as "abnormal" or "deviant" according to Braun (2000). In this way, non-heterosexuality is left open to question and perhaps both overt and covert prejudice and discrimination. This indicates that LGB people are vulnerable to stigmatisation and/or shaming in their coming out process (Broad, 2011). Alexander and Clare's (2004) study offers some evidence of connections between individual and societal factors of heterosexism and homophobia, in their exploration of the use of self-injury as a coping strategy for lesbian women, and how sexual identity can be

constructed as both a source of strength and pride, and a source of negative feelings. It would seem reasonable to extrapolate the possible effects of these discourses to the heterosexual partners of LGB people.

This issue is widened by Buxton (2000; 2005) who suggests that her research indicates while both spouses in mixed-orientation marriages appear to value the relationship, most report being unable to successfully continue within the culturally espoused form of marriage that exists. It would seem important therefore to identify how heteronormative discourses are constructed and deployed, and how straight spouses and partners might be similarly impacted by these discourses. Some evidence of the cultural influences posited by Buxton was offered by Clarke, Braun and Wooles (2015) who used a story completion tool to examine the effects of hypothesised emotional or sexual infidelity in heterosexual marriage. They found that same-sex infidelity was conceptualised by their participants as the "worst case scenario" and was underpinned by a heteronormative framing of repressed homosexuality, with participants drawing on established and essentialist discourses of sexuality and gender. Although it is noted that the use of hypothesised infidelities may have made it more likely that the participants would draw on normative accounts of heterosexual relationship. Additionally, Wolkomir (2009) highlighted the hegemonic power of heterosexual marriage in a grounded theory analysis of mixed orientation marriages. The study argued that individuals in these marriages, whether they ultimately remain together or not, may attempt a number of ways of normalising their experiences, are constrained by an ideology of romantic love, and generally appeared to rework their marriages to conform as closely as possible to a heteronormative template of the ideal. Wolkomir suggested that this was the case where the couples ultimately divorced or remained married. Arguably, this then reinforces a dominant heterosexual discourse of marriage (Herz & Johansson, 2015).

2.2.5 Similarities to heterosexual relationship breakdown

Buxton (2004, 2006) acknowledges that many of the challenges of relationship breakdown are not peculiar to the break-down of mixed-orientation marriages. Illustrative of these similarities, Walzer & Oles's (2003) study of interview talk indicated that an adversarial narrative framework is drawn upon by divorcing heterosexual couples regardless of the reasons for divorce. While there may be no legal basis for fault in most heterosexual divorces, Hopper (2001, p.442) suggests a pattern of narrative fault perpetuating the sense that divorce is an injustice for at least one of the parties involved. Divorce was explored as a site of conflict, and the findings suggest that the two parties have to adopt opposing roles of initiator or non-initiator, and he outlined how these positions then influence discursive access to different narratives of the marriages and the breakdown of the relationships. Initiators of divorce constructed their marriages as "false" and non-initiators constructed their spouses as deceptive. The study further suggests that interviewees engaged in talk which was not only deployed to discursively dissolve the marriages, but to actually undo them or render them void of meaning, in order to maintain shared symbolic cultural ideals of marriage as sacred, valued and permanent.

In further exploration of heterosexual relationship dissolution, Lawes (1999) posits that the breakdown was considered by the heterosexual participants in the study to be a consequence of inadequate investment in relationships, thereby also highlighting the possibility of marital success through investment in the relationship and working to make the relationship function. Alongside these constructions, the male and female participants employed opposing realist discourses attributing relationship outcomes to luck. These seemingly contradictory discourses demonstrated marriage as a discursive object which is constructed in particular ways according to occasion. Lawes argues that divorce is similarly constituted according

to desired discursive action; however, additionally, it is suggested that the meanings and implications of divorce have different constructions relating to gender. The current study then, suggests a case for examining how these kinds of discourses might influence a straight partner in a MOM or MORE, bearing in mind the additional complication of the partners' concealed sexuality.

2.2.6 Implications of disclosure for straight partners

Buxton (2006) argues that the straight husbands, wives and partners from a mixed orientation relationship are unnoticed and disregarded to some extent by society: indicating that there appears to be a lack of language – both academic and societal - to talk about straight partners' experiences, and a lack of opportunity to for straight partners themselves to talk about their issues. A similar lack of conversational terms to talk about civil partnerships was explored by Rolfe and Peel (2011). They argue that this absence may highlight a degree of social discomfort which still exists when talking about same-sex relationships, which may be germane to the straight partner experience. Rolfe and Peel also highlight that civil partnerships, in the main, are framed positively within liberal discourse in legislation and in United Kingdom society generally but are still subsumed in a heteronormative discourse of marriage.

It is suggested that the heterosexually identifying partner may cope with the disclosure following common stages beginning with initial trauma, and leading to eventual personal transformation (Buxton, 2004, 2005, 2006c; Schwartz, 2012). Hernandez and Wilson (2007) used the theory of ambiguous loss and a symbolic interactionist epistemology to analyse the narratives of five heterosexual Seventh Day Adventist women who had been in a mixed-orientation marriage that had ended. Thematic coding was utilised which illustrated a wave-like process of emotional

issues in their experiences. The authors concluded that the women had experienced chronic complicated grief compounded by their conservative religious beliefs (Boss, 2009). A limitation of this study was that the participants were all women, so there was no comparison between how the religious factor may or may not affect male straight spouses. The study adopted a realist epistemology to examine the themes, and the effect of a religious factor on the narrative. It did not consider other macro influences or discourses, nor how the absence of a religious factor may impact the participants' constructions of the experience.

However, Buxton (2004, 2005, 2006c) argues that alongside the challenges that may be common to other relationship breakdown, straight spouses or partners face the additional challenge of dealing with negative societal and cultural views about LGB people that reflect not only on the disclosing partners, but also on the straight partners and any children of the union. For example, McDermott, Roen and Scourfield's (2008) study highlighted a hidden discourse of homophobic induced shame amongst young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, which suggests that this group have to employ shame-avoidance strategies to negotiate positions and construct identities, and that this may make them vulnerable to self-destructive behaviours. Mixed-orientation couples who stay married, or remain on good terms following divorce also report a lack of wider support from their families and communities according to Buxton (1994, 2000, 2004).

Buxton (2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c) suggests that straight partners report being previously fairly content in their marriages and being traumatised by the discovery or disclosure of their partners' sexuality, describing feeling stunned, deeply hurt, angry, and betrayed. While these responses could be expected to be evoked by infidelity, or sudden relationship breakdown in any circumstance, the added complication for straight partners appears to be a sense of fraudulence surrounding

their relationships. A sense of something taken from them, and a shared sense of shame about the partners' sexuality which from the reviewed literature appears to compromise their anger and sense of being wronged by the infidelities and the deception. This may be illustrated by Wolkomir (2009) who suggests that the introduction of sexuality other than a presumed and taken for granted heterosexuality into a relationship problematises a hegemonic link between love and intimacy and sexual desire between men and women, leaving people with no script to follow and no immediate way to make sense of the experience.

Buxton and Pinely (2013) represent the stories of some straight spouses and partners in their collection of anecdotal accounts, in which straight partners describe their experiences. The authors present the accounts in an effort to have the voices of these straight partners heard and to illuminate the pain, loss and anger in the accounts, and to identify how it may be possible for the straight partners to find themselves in an 'unscripted' situation. However, no analysis of the content of the accounts is offered, nor any suggestions for how the straight partners construct meanings in these experiences.

2.2.7 Construction of a victim identity in talk.

The literature outlined above indicates that while the disclosing partner faces problems, straight partners may face issues that are unique to the difficulties of their experience, such as loss of identity, a sense of victimisation by both the disclosing partner and wider communities, and therapeutic deficiencies in available counselling resources. However, it is noticeable from within the confines of the literature reviewed that although the authors occasionally explicitly construct the straight partner as a "victim" (Adler & Ben Ari, 2018, p.651; Buxton, 2004 p.103; Buxton, 2006b, p.120, p.128; Buxton, 2006b, p.56;) of the experience; the constructions of a victim identity

for the straight partner are frequently not done explicitly, but instead are implicitly present in the talk and described in terms of pain, suffering, hurt, helplessness and powerlessness that is described. Arguably, we could infer from this that the literature problematises simplistic or binary understandings of the term "victim" in a relationship breakdown, which have not been previously explored.

From a constructionist perspective the construction of a victim identity is best understood as a discursive position within talk, instantiated at specific moments within a sequence of interaction. Without this categorisation one cannot be constructed as a victim. In studies of victimhood in general, Dunn (2001) for example, posits that categorisation of' victim is framed by multiple perspectives, and is historically, culturally, and organisationally situated. Holstein and Miller (1997) also suggest that in an interactionist framework, the social processes through which a person is categorised a victim become central. These processes appear to be unproblematic according to Strobl if both the person who positions themselves as victim and those who are the audience for the event categorise it in the same way. From a social constructionist perspective Loseke (2003) argues that in American culture, popular understanding of claims to the identity of victim are validated only when others perceive that person to be deserving of sympathy. She suggests the following implicit characteristics of people who are constructed as "worthy of sympathy*"* by prevalent discourses in American society: (1) people who are not responsible for the harm they experience; (2) people who are evaluated as moral; and (3) people in exceptionally difficult conditions (Loseke, 2003, p. 78–79).

Construction of a victim identity in talk can used to deflect personal responsibility as suggested by (Holstein & Miller, 1997; Karmen, 2012; Loseke, 2003) and to imply a perpetrator or guilty party other than self. Leisenring's (2006) study on victim discourses in the self-representations of abused women posits that women

most often claimed a victim identity to convey they had suffered a harm outside of their control and to demonstrate that they were deserving of sympathy. However, the study also found that the women also rejected a victim identity to distance themselves from the notion of non-agency, and to distance themselves from culpability for their experiences. The literature which has been outlined here deals with constructions of victimhood in the case of crime or intimate partner violence rather than relationship breakdown. The circumstances of the participants in the current study are also different from a relationship breakdown where one partner leaves, or has a sexual relationship with another heterosexual partner. However, there may also be implications for the current study in terms of how the participants negotiate a victim identity in their talk, a "being wronged' by the disclosing partner, without potentially victimising the sexuality of that partner.

2.2.8 The discursive construction of a victim identity

The interest in the construction of a victim identity in talk within the current thesis has some resonance with wider discursive literatures concerning both identity constructions and the occupation of a victim position within talk. Antaki and Widdicombe (1998, p.14) suggest that "people work up and resist identities in indexical, creative and unpredictable ways". An example of that is illustrated by Beattie and Doherty (1995) where discursive psychology was utilised to explore how eyewitnesses to sectarian violence in Northern Ireland construct versions of their social world and social identities in that world. They suggest that eyewitness accounts in such sensitive situations, while powerful, can potentially be dismissed as partisan accounts so require sensitive and complex construction. The study concludes that a victim identity is constructed in two ways in the accounts considered: the individual eyewitness is defined in the talk as being either subjected to suffering outside of their control or suffering through no fault of their own and is specifically and

flexibly constructed as blameless. A similarly complex identity negotiation may potentially be constructed by participants in the current study, as they navigate their seemingly sensitive claim to victimhood.

2.2.9 Managing the attribution of accountability

In a similar manner to the management of a victim identity, the management of accountability and blame in the available literature is largely implicit. The explicit references that were identified are concentrated around the straight partners' self-blaming (Buxton, 2004, pp.99,102,103,104; Buxton, 2006b, pp.53,57,65; Buxton, 2006c, p.322; Buxton & Pinely, 2013; Grever, 2012, p.71; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007, p.191; Schwartz, 2012, p.127). Blaming a partner's deception rather than their sexuality was explicitly mentioned in Bradford (2012, p.15) and Buxton (2011, p.527). There are some references to a fear of being blamed by the disclosing partner or a wider community (Buxton, 2005, pp.55,58; Buxton 2006a, pp.115,116,126), however, only Wolkomir (2004, p.752) explicitly addressed the straight partners' resistance of blame. This lack of explicit talk could be understood to imply a caution or wariness about how straight partners manage blame or accountability in their talk, which has not been explored in previous literature. Furthermore, the absence of talk could be interpreted as indicating what Edwards and Potter (1992) argue is a dilemma of stake or interest in peoples' accounts of their experience. They suggest that when individuals produce accounts placing blame on another person or group of people, they must necessarily discursively manage the construction of their account to avoid it being undermined by listeners. The literature raises questions around the participants' ability to explicitly "accuse" their partners of wrong-doing, and how they might negotiate that in their accounts.

2.2.10 The discursive construction of accountability

Similarly to the interest in the construction of a victim identity in talk, this study seeks to examine the potential relevance of talk around accountability. Whilst from a constructionist position it is important not to reify accountability and blame, the realisation of these discursive positions has been a concern within the discursive literature and may have a bearing on the data that emerges from the participants' accounts within this research. in the preceding literature led the researcher to exploring the discursive construction of blame and accountability in other works. The attribution of blame is addressed by Beattie and Doherty's (1995) examination of the construction of the speakers' innocent identities. Drawing on Wowk's (1984) exploration of the use of membership category activities in the differentiation of victim and perpetrator identities, they suggest that speakers orient to a dilemma of stake or interest, implicitly referring to membership categories by defining activities or attributes that are normally associated with that category. They further suggest that the categories themselves can also be mobilised through their normally understood attributes to make inferences available about motivation and blame. The discursive management of blame and accountability is also addressed in Abell and Stokoe's (1999) analysis of transcripts from a BBC television interview between Princess Diana and the journalist Martin Bashir. The analysis focused on the complex rhetorical business performed by Princess Diana's allocation of blame in three different categories for the break-up of her marriage to Prince Charles, balanced with managing her own accountability in the events. They identified ways this was managed in the transcripts which illustrated the discursive work done by Diana in attributing blame to others in differing ways, in her deployment of rhetorical strategies in her descriptions of past events.

The sensitive topic of accountability in issues of racism and prejudice have also been addressed utilising forms of discursive psychology to analyse open-ended interviews with participants (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Tileaga, 2005; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Discourse analysis has also been used to examine similarly sensitive topics, such as Terry and Braun's (2013, p.10) exploration of men's construction of meaning around vasectomy using what the authors describe as a "synthetic" approach to discourse analysis drawing on both thematic analysis and a critical discursive psychology (Edley & Wetherell,1997). They found that talking about vasectomy provided an opportunity for men to make sense of the self, and the decision-making processes, within a complex and relational understanding of masculinities. The common thread in this selection of literature is the complexity of both the subtle and direct discursive work that is undertaken by people constructing potentially "sensitive" identities, and this is pertinent to the issues at stake for the participants in the current study.

2.3 Implications for therapeutic practice and counselling psychology

2.3.1 The straight partner and therapeutic practice

In light of the issues of victimhood and accountability highlighted above and other possible consequences of relationship breakdown in general, and in the case of the particular issues for mixed orientation relationships that may exist, it seems reasonable to assume that both the disclosing partner and the straight partner might benefit from seeking psychological support in the form of counselling or therapy. Despite an assertion by Ritter and Terndrup (2002) that there has been a rapid growth in the field of affirmative therapy with the LGB client group, other research suggests that many therapists and counsellors are still not equipped to work with LGB clients. Grove and Blasby's (2009) thematic analysis of same sex couples' experience of

counselling concluded that the participants were sensitive to the way in which the counsellor related to them and their relationship, and that their perceptions of the counsellor's underlying sense of discomfort, understood through counsellor tentativeness, over-affirmation or perceived lack of knowledge about same sex relationships, impact on the counselling relationship and the efficacy of the therapeutic process.

In a similar vein, a thematic analysis of the clinical experiences of novice counsellors working with LGBT clients concluded that while the participants had gained knowledge and learning from challenges they face working with LGBT clients, they felt unprepared by their training (Owen-Pugh & Baines, 2014). The authors suggest that initial training should include an emphasis on inclusive theories and provide trainees with opportunities for the exploration of sexuality issues with clients. A content analysis of LGB studies in couple and family therapy related journals indicated a substantial increase in attention paid to LGB populations since a previous analysis in 1996, which was viewed as a positive move (Hartwell, Serovich, Grafsky, & Kerr, 2012). However, the authors called for more rigorous research with broad methodologies to continue to develop both training for and enhancing working with LGB group in a move away from what they term a “heterocentric tunnel” (p.235).

It would seem reasonable to assume then that the lack of expertise may also extend to counselling people who are related to or have close relationships with the disclosing individuals. For counselling psychologists and therapists there is not only a lack of understanding of the experience of being the straight partner of an LGB person, but there is also a paucity of literature about how they make sense of their circumstances. Buxton (2006b) suggests that a number of straight partners do find therapy useful for working on personal issues including rage, fear, depression, lack of self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. In particular, a lack of therapist bias

toward either partner and lack of preconception about mixed orientation marriage was rated as helpful. Less helpful elements were described as the opposite attitudes to those listed above, or any suggestion that divorce was inevitable. Buxton (2004; 2006b; 2012) argues that the general lack of knowledge about the phenomenon in the profession may present challenges to best practice in counselling these individuals or couples. She suggests that understanding the issues and stages of coping that straight partners encounter will enable therapists and counsellors to work more effectively with them.

Although coming from an essentialist standpoint rather than a constructionist view, Schwartz (2012) suggests that in common with grieving for other losses, straight partners may go through predictable stages as suggested by Kubler-Ross (1973); denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Schwartz argues that although this process is similar to grief for other losses, and can touch on past losses, there are unique issues around betrayal for the straight partner that need to be dealt with sensitively and separated from any anti-gay or lesbian beliefs. Schwartz further suggests that therapists who work with this client group need to be aware of their own attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual issues. This is relevant from a constructionist view point, as even if we reject any truth claims about grief and loss, it is interesting to consider the many and complex discourses that might influence both the straight partner and the counsellor or therapist in this experience. The literature search revealed one suggested framework for working therapeutically with mixed orientation couples who are considering remaining together (Yarhouse & Kays, 2010), which suggests providing sexual identity therapy, addressing the interpersonal trauma, fostering resilience in the couple and enhancing sexual intimacy. Adler and Ben-Ari (2017) suggested a culturally specific conceptual model to aid therapists' and researchers' understanding of this experience for Israeli women. The study which examined interviews with eight women in MOREs utilising a phenomenological

paradigm, suggested various challenges in the process of reconstructing reality following disclosure, including the reconstruction of: the identities of both partners, the relationship itself, and the women's relationship with their social environment. As acknowledged by the authors, the study was limited by its cultural specificity.

Buxton (2006b) posits that peer support is also essential to provide first-hand knowledge of the experience. She argues that narrating one's own experience and listening to others' stories helps people formulate what has happened, find meaning in the experience and ultimately recover from it – whether that is together as a couple or as an individual. She argues that straight partners can find this support in peer support groups such as SSN (Buxton, 2006b). She outlines three goals of SSN as firstly, to help people cope with the experience and grow in strength and understanding. A second goal is identified as, building bridges of understanding so that families can be reconstructed following the disclosure regardless of whether they stay together or not. Thirdly, to raise public awareness of the issue for the benefit of both the straight and LGB partners. She further suggests that through SSN a corps of advocates for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people have emerged from the group members who have felt heard and have had their needs met in the support group.

In terms of literature regarding therapeutic intervention for straight partners, Buxton & Pinely (2013) presented a selection of extracts collected over twenty-six years from twenty thousand people from a variety of world-wide sources - the SSN, narratives collected for the purpose of the book, and stories appearing in emails and from mailing lists from 2005 to 2011 - where straight spouses tell their own stories about the experience of discovering that their spouses were lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The book charts straight spouses' journeys from the trauma of discovery to personal transformation. It is intended as a helpful guide for people going

through the experience themselves, and to educate and sensitise those readers who are not to the difficulties encountered by straight partners and their families. As this book presents anecdotal accounts, there is no analysis offered of how the straight partners might construct this experience. However, the authors suggest that the accounts are organised in a manner which allows the reader to "better hear and see the whole picture of a straight spouse's struggle" (Buxton & Pinely, 2013, p.3). Grever & Bowman (2008) previously produced a step by step psychotherapeutic guide to recovery for heterosexual people who discover their partner's gay or lesbian sexual identity. As this was intended as a self-help manual for straight partners, rather than a guide for clinicians, arguably then, there is a gap in the literature regarding best practice for counselling or providing psychological therapy to this client group.

Furthermore, although there is a small body of work on the topic of the experience of being a straight partner, there is an overall lack of fine-grained qualitative analysis of this phenomenon, and a specific lack of how the people affected construct their experiences in talk. Building on Parker's (1998) approach to counselling and psychotherapy, which suggests deconstructing the discourses available to clients to talk about their issues, while acknowledging the professional discourses that frame the therapeutic encounter with each client, could offer a way for professionals to understand and engage with this client group's issues. To that end then, examining how straight partners talk about their experiences may lead to a deeper understanding of, and sensitising to the constructs in play in talk, which may aid in counselling this client group, and could perhaps illuminate hegemonic discourses of heterosexuality that may still prevail, and that this client group may be influenced by. Examples of these discourses are illustrated in Barrett and Bound (2015), who followed a three-stage framework of critical discourse analysis to examine potential problematic effects of non-promotion of homosexuality policies in

U.S. schools. It included description of the discourse, interpretation of the processes producing the discourse, and an explanation of the discourse's societal impact.

2.3.2 Implications for Counselling Psychology in particular

The issues considered in the preceding section have impacts for the clinical component of Counselling Psychology. Of particular relevance to the profession would also appear to be the possibility that the experience of this client group highlights a social justice issue regarding heteronormativity as an ideology or discourse that affects both the 'coming out' partner and the straight partner. Hanley, Steffen and O'Hara (2016) posit that in our roles as scientist-practitioners, counselling psychologists carry out research with the purpose of informing professional practice, and to give a voice to those who have been silenced. There appears to be a complexity at play here for the profession in the need to maintain an approach which acknowledges and addresses the issues that exist for people who identify as 'non-heterosexual' and simultaneously, to be aware of and sensitive to the issues that affect any heterosexually identifying partners (Hicks, 2010). However, the latter group currently do not seem to be currently visible in our professional discourses around sexuality, revealing a paucity of literature to inform this topic.

2.4 Research aims

The research question asks: how do people who identify as straight within heterosexually intentioned relationships in the United Kingdom construct their lives following the disclosure by a partner of a lesbian, gay or bisexual sexuality? In an effort to illuminate this experience a little, the present study offers an analysis of the talk of people who identify as straight partners, which will be regarded in this thesis

as one possible reading of an infinite number of ways of understanding this issue. It is suggested that using a form of discourse analysis may illustrate how straight spouses make sense of, construct and "do" their identities in a context where they are impacted by their partners' LGB identities. Therefore, the analysis attempts to explore both implicit and explicit constructions of self and identity that may appear in the talk. It illustrates participants' use of identity talk in the micro context of the group or individual interviews, within which they talk up their positions and (re)construct their own realities (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

The study also attempts to explore how discursive ideologies about heterosexual relationships may be structured in macro societal discourses informing not just the participants, but all of us, including counselling psychologists, other psychotherapeutic practitioners who may work with this client group, and researchers. It is also important to focus our attention on how we may be privileging certain constructions over others in our own talk. Examining both the micro and the macro context may enable a more nuanced understanding of the discourses and discursive resources that straight partners draw on and are informed by in the interview and group discussion accounts. So in conclusion, having identified the seemingly neglected experience of the straight spouse or partner in the literature, the proposed methodological approach which will be outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 may be able to extend our knowledge of the consequences of a partner's disclosure on participants' constructions of self and identity in the context of current available discourses, or newly produced discourses.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction to methodology

This chapter presents the process of selection of the methodology employed to address the research question. The chapter will initially focus on outlining the potential methods of analysis that were considered, and then move on to discuss what is referred to for the purposes of this study as a modified discourse analysis approach. The approach, which influenced by both discursive psychology and critical discursive psychology is outlined later in this chapter.

3.2 Quantitative methods

The objective of quantitative research is to obtain information using standardised conditions, in order that the data can be treated, analysed and interpreted statistically. An advantage of a quantitative approach is the possibility of making numerical comparisons and enabling statistical generalisations. However, this approach also presents some limitations, such as, the number and scope of questions is necessarily limited. In the case of the current study, the sensitive nature of the topic, and the researcher's aim to allow for as free a voice as possible for the individual participants to share their stories, immediate concerns were raised that it would be difficult to encapsulate responses in formal or closed questions. There would be a danger of losing the understandings that the participants ascribe to their own experiences, and a reductive effect, as participant responses to *a priori* quantitative questions such as those in a self-report questionnaire, would inevitably treat the issue asked about as real, knowable, true across context and measurable – rather than as locally produced and culturally and historically situated constructions

of reality (Coolican, 2009). This would have the undesired effect of treating each participant as identical, which would then not be challenged by the participants' individual circumstances. As a trainee counselling psychologist this felt anathema to the epistemological foundations of the profession (Strawbridge, 2016). As the participants were being sought from a closed support group there was also a limited and unknown quantity of data available. An ethical and moral consideration for the researcher was also the question "what would a person gain from participation in this study?" There was a risk that using a measure such as a questionnaire would introduce a power disparity between the researcher and the participant. The participant would be required to give answers to questions of the researcher's choosing. This would also have seemed to pre-determine within quite narrow parameters the nature of the information received (Coolican, 2009). This would have been at odds with the intended aim of the study as stated above.

3.3 Qualitative methods

Coolican (2009) posits that qualitative researchers are seeking to challenge the *positivist* quantitative paradigm, concentrating instead on the meanings of actions and peoples' sense-making in social contexts, the co-construction of knowledge between a reflexive researcher and the participant, approaching participants' terms and interpretations as the most important starting point, and employing an inductive approach to the data. This is pertinent to the research question as the literature reviewed in the previous chapter does not suggest that there is predefined hypotheses to be tested with regard to the experience of straight partners, but rather phenomena to be investigated and – more specifically -that there is a need to consider how talk actively constructs these experiences. In further support of an argument then for a qualitative approach, Lewis and Ritchie (2003) posit that qualitative research seeks to capture emergent concepts and is not overly predetermined in

coverage, therefore it allows potential for ideas to be generated through, and then placed in, the contexts from which they arise. In that way, they argue it has the potential to develop new understandings of social phenomena. Social constructionism is an epistemological umbrella term for many different qualitative approaches which share a common, and critical interest in how language constructs knowledge. Burr (2006, p.47) argues that "language and our use of it, far from simply describing the world, both constructs the world as we perceive it, and has real consequences". Therefore, in line with a stated goal for the study which was to attempt to capture as "freely" as possible the breadth of what the participants might wish to share, and to focus on how they talk about their experience, it appeared a qualitative methodology with a social constructionist epistemological stance would be helpful. To facilitate the identification of a methodology that felt most authentic to the research question then, a number of qualitative methods were explored and considered.

3.3.1 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) takes a realist approach to analysis, exploring how people make sense of their subjective experiences and life-worlds, as revealed through first-person accounts (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). It suggests that the lived experience is more than historically and socially located discourse (Willig, 2013). It views a person's own perception of the world as the primary view (Coolican, 2009), and positions itself as influenced by symbolic interactionism (Giddens, 2001). It also adopts a gentle constructionist stance to analysis in recognising the importance of language in how individuals make meaning from lived experiences, and then how researchers make sense of participants' meaning making (sometimes termed double hermeneutics) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA's unit of analysis is the participant's embodied experience, and an IPA

analysis attempts to capture the main claims, concerns, motivations and actions of participants, and then interprets and represents this in terms of psychological constructs (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). This approach would have suited the purposeful sampling of the participants in the study, and a small sample would not have been an obstacle to in-depth analysis. This phenomenologically influenced approach had merits such as the emphasis and validation placed on the participants' perceptions of their experiences, and the reflexive stance taken by the researcher. Bracketing prior knowledge of the participants' experiences was not considered to be an issue as it was an unknown quantity to the researcher (Tufford and Newman, 2012). However, a constraint with this method is that it infers internal and stable constructs such as beliefs and attitudes. Similar to a narrative line of inquiry, this ignores the performative and action orientation of language, and does not allow for talk to be examined in terms of what it accomplishes in its own rights. It could also be argued that it overlooks the broader discursive frameworks through which the participants may interpret their experiences.

3.3.2 Grounded theory analysis

With regard to using grounded theory as a method of analysis, the question seemed to be "why not?" rather than "why?" Given the lack of theory and literature available on the topic of the study, grounded theory would appear to offer an attractive approach. As a method it has intuitive appeal: holding a potential for conceptualization, and a systematic approach to data analysis allowing for and encouraging the emergence of rich data, and it also encourages creativity (Hussein, Hirst, Salyers & Osuji, 2014). Grounded theory's concept of theoretical sampling would have suited the unique nature of the participants' common experience, and the freedom to reform the research question to suit the emergent theory was also appealing (Coolican, 2009). Originating in symbolic interactionism, grounded theory

suggests that meaning is negotiated and understood through social processes and interactions (Jeon, 2004). Its aim is the development of an explanatory theory of these contexted processes by eliciting participants' stories (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Charmaz (2006) asserts that grounded theory gives the researcher a framework and guidelines to conduct a rigorous qualitative inquiry, which other qualitative approaches may be lacking. This approach has attractions for a novice researcher who is seeking direction and guidance. However, conversely the factors which gave this approach appeal can also represent limitations to the researcher. The immersive and exhaustive nature of a grounded theory analysis is time consuming and laborious according to Myers (2009) and should not be rushed. Myers (2009) further posits that a novice researcher may become bogged down in the coding process and lose sight of the wider goal of discovery of ideas and themes in the data. Furthermore, although there are forms of grounded theory which proport to consider how talks constructs reality (Charmaz, 2006), ultimately a method which extracts units of meaning across different passages of talk in order to subsequently produce meaning-based categories, seems to inherently mitigate against the possibility of examining in detail how constructions are locally produced in talk. In addition, a key issue for the researcher of how broader cultural discourses may influence the talk appears to fall outside the remit of a grounded theory approach.

3.3.3 Narrative analysis

In common with grounded theory, initially, a narrative approach which privileges individual actors, plots or temporal elements of accounts (Stein & Albro, 1997) was considered as a possibility. It would have been an interesting method to explore the ways in which the participants create storied accounts of their experiences as straight partners and use these stories to make sense of their worlds, and to represent themselves. Riessman (1993) describes different approaches to

narrative analysis that encompass relativist epistemology - personal “emplotted” accounts or stories can be contrastively examined and the genres individuals draw on can be explored. A second type of analysis examines the structure of, and thematic connections between the core narratives that emerge in interviews. Yet another version involves re-transcribing the narrative as poetic stanzas which are then examined for meaning through identified organising metaphors. It was understood that the particular method of narrative analysis selected for use depends on what the researcher wants to examine and why. The stories could provide temporally, socially and historically embedded narratives of peoples’ experiences (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013), so in this sense the method offered an attractively non-reductive approach. The narratives are not truth claims, so the approach is more linked to a social constructionist stance than a positivist one, and to that extent may address the constructionist interests of the research outlined above.

However, this is arguable, as though varied in format, Crossley (2007) posits an underlying realist epistemology for narrative analysis where social and cultural conditions are determinants of what stories people can tell. This indicates that there is an *a priori* imposing of a narrative lens through which to view the data which foregrounds chronological frameworks and storied accounts, rather than adopting – as Sacks (1992) suggests – a naïve, unmotivated view. Ultimately then, a narrative approach then seemed a more dilemmatic approach in terms of epistemology, as it ranged from social constructionism to critical realism (Silver, 2013). Similarly to the issues considered with a grounded theory approach, a narrative approach does not stay with the level of the text and examine what the participants’ talk does locally and so appears counter-productive to a study whose aim is exploring the participants’ constructions of their understandings through their talk.

3.4 Discursive approaches

The perceived constraints with methods of qualitative analysis outlined above, and a conviction that the major complaint emerging from the reviewed literature and anecdotal accounts was one of being 'unheard' as a straight partner, led the researcher to the view that a discourse analysis approach would suit the spirit of the research question. The rationale being that discourse analysis enables the oft neglected aspects of how these experiences are constructed in talk, and what those constructions are doing, to be carefully examined. As the research question was deliberately broad, the research was committed to approaching the data in an attitude of unknowing, rather than with any specific theories in mind. Sacks (1992) argues that examining talk without the motivation of a particular or specific question can result in unexpected gains, whereas addressing data with a particular interest in mind from the outset can blind the researcher to other options within the talk, and thus unnecessarily constrain the findings of the research project. With this in mind, various approaches to discourse analysis (DA) were considered.

3.4.1 Epistemology

DA has its roots in critiques of traditional social science, which gives it a different epistemological basis from other methodologies. Discursive approaches share a social constructionist epistemology, a "conviction that discourse is of central importance in constructing the ideas, social processes, and phenomena that make up our social world" (Nikander, 2008, p.413). Constructionist methodologies make no assumptions about the social world, hence the term 'post-structuralism', but are committed to the way knowledge is linked to social practices and action (Burr, 2006). They adopt a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge and a skepticism towards accepting our observations of the world as unproblematic, and they view

those observations as historically and culturally specific (Gill, 2000). Rather, as suggested by Gergen (1999), we construct and interpret our realities using meanings available to us, using symbols and language to construct a sense of who we are and the world we live in. Expanding on that argument, Potter and Hepburn (2008) suggest that discourse is situated in three ways. Firstly, it is situated in a sequential and necessary environment which orients to prior and following talk. Secondly, it is generated within, and gives structure to institutional practices. Thirdly, it is rhetorically situated in the sense that people construct their talk in ways that counter possible relevant alternative versions.

Discourse analysis can therefore claim to be cleanly constructionist in epistemology, talk is action in interaction, not a lens to internal experiences. Discourse analysis deals with how language categorises the social world (Parker 1992), and the unit of analysis is language. It attempts to stay with the text and avoids making assumptions or truth claims about what the speaker is trying to achieve at a psychological level. Ontologically speaking, the participants' intentions or motivations are considered as constructions in the discourse rather than external representations of pre-existing internal meanings (Willig, 2013). Discourse analysis also has less to do with a prescriptive step by step formula and more about maintaining an attitude of poststructuralist inquiry to the data, avoiding truth claims and staying close to the epistemological foundations of the research (Walton, 2007; Frost, 2011).

3.4.2 Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) analyses naturally occurring interaction (Ten Have, 2007), and has been argued by Schegloff (1997) to be ideologically neutral, although this has been contested by Billig (1999, p.543) who contends that CA has a foundational "rhetoric which conveys a contestable view of social order". It can be

described, along with discursive psychology as a 'bottom-up' or 'micro' method of analysis (Wiggins, 2017). The focus of the method is on understanding the mechanics of interactions. That is, it could have been utilised here to interrogate the structure and organization of talk, and how social actions are achieved through the arrangement of talk, sounds, gestures, silences and turn-taking, and the categories invoked by the participants to perform their interactions (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1978). In this way, the study might have explored how people accomplish social order and norms in everyday social interaction. Wetherell (1998) in response to Schegloff (1997) interrogates the foregrounding of participant orientations alone in the pursuit of empirically grounded analyses, and argues for an approach that also encompasses ideological dilemmas and addresses questions such as "why this utterance here?" in peoples' accounts.

3.4.3 Foucauldian discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), in common with critical discourse analysis (CDA) takes a macro or "top down" approach to discourse analysis. It is concerned with historical inquiry around the topic of interest, the mechanisms of power that operate in society, and how people are subject to, but also resistant to these mechanisms. FDA seeks to explore the relationship between discourse and subjectivity and the knowledge, and the subject positions that are produced, taken up or resisted in the discourse (Wiggins, 2017). Foucauldian discourse analysis concepts which might have be employed here such as a gendered discourse or a heteronormative discourse could have examined how the participants' discourses make available particular world views and how their subjective experiences are influenced by these discourses (Willig, 2013). FDA posits that discourses privilege some ways of being over others, and that discourses can become embedded and

circulating in cultures to the point that they are taken for granted or viewed as 'common sense'.

CDA however, is an explicitly political approach to research which involves making visible, and therefore open to challenge and change, the ways in which we construct our worlds (Fairclough, 2013). CDA also takes a macro or top down approach to analysis which aims to highlight particular processes being deployed by participants that are anchored to their context, and to reveal hidden ideologies at work in discourse which marginalise or oppress people in society (Wiggins, 2017). CDA views discourse as the means through which power is exercised in society through institutions. Unlike other forms of DA it also views language as a matter of deliberate choice. Also unlike other forms of discourse analysis CDA is looking for hidden meanings rather than meanings constructed in interaction. So in the case of this study it could potentially focus on exploring how global patterns of heterosexual marriage and sexual identity constrain or shape the roles available to the participants, but would miss the local interaction of the talk and its action potential.

3.4.4 Discursive psychology

In common with CA, discursive psychology is a zoom lens approach to the analysis of discourse (Wiggins, 2017) The major aim of discursive psychology is to examine how psychological constructs are made relevant in interaction. It explores, for example, how identities, attitudes, responsibilities and behaviours are produced in accounts (Wiggins, 2017). Discursive psychology looks in particular at how these resources are used consistently or varyingly either within the same texts or across texts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Unlike CA, DP does not begin with social actions, but focuses instead on the production of categories and psychological issues in the talk. The participants' speech is viewed as social action, subject to change across

different contexts (Willig, 2013), and examined in terms of what it accomplishes within the context of the particular research question. In this approach people are considered to be agentic, and informed, using talk to promote their own interests in their accounts. Potter (2005) evidenced how DP can provide social critique on the discursive psychology of institutions, issues around addressing cognitivism and categorisation, and importantly for the current study work on sensitive topics such as racism. A purely discursive psychology approach could then have examined how participants might use discursive resources such as rhetorical devices to "do" things in the context of their own experience as straight partners and would examine the effects of these actions.

3.4.5 Critical discursive psychology

In common with DP, Critical discursive psychology (CDP) emerged from the work of Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, and later Nigel Edley (Wiggins, 2017). The method appears to occupy a middle ground between macro and micro methods of analysis, capturing some of the detail of the discursive interactions, while also arguing that the influences of broader cultural issues cannot be ignored (Wiggins, 2017). As posited by Wetherell (1998), CDP employs three main analytic concepts: *interpretative repertoires*, *subject positions* and *ideological dilemmas*. Potter & Wetherell (1987) define interpretative repertoires as coherent sets of ways, or patterns, of speaking about any issue, which individuals can draw on flexibly in order to perform different actions. In this study the terms interpretative repertoire and discourse are used interchangeably, both signifying in this context the talk culturally available to the participants, which they are both influenced by, and can in turn influence.

In CDP, interpretative repertoires may make it possible to gain some understanding of how peoples' talk both enables and limits the construction of the self and others. Similarly to the Foucauldian "discourse", some repertoires become more established and dominant than others and can become understood as "fact" or common sense. Unlike, the Foucauldian view however, these discourses are not hidden. Gill (2009) argues that interpretative repertoires may be fluid concepts as they may be more specific to the context of their use and offer more flexible subject positions. In this context, orientating and positioning may have tentative links with Aronsson's (1998) metaphor of social choreography which suggests that gender and power, among other social categorisations, can be understood in terms of identity in interaction and situated discursive practices (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). Although the notion of interpretative repertories has been extensively employed in discourse analyses, Wooffitt (2005) suggests that it has some limitations such as the potential difficulty in making clear judgements about which repertoires are in play outside of institutional settings with clear discourses. Although acknowledged by Wooffitt as one important development, he suggests that it is increasingly supplemented or replaced by studies which examine the rhetorical organization of talk, as well as the complex, and contextually sensitive manner in which accounts are constructed and contested. In the current study, the term interpretative repertoire is used to capture the identification of constructions present within the participants' talk which the researcher identifies as doing interactional work and, or realising ideologies in the talk.

Another concept of importance to CDP is that of the ideological dilemma. This concept was developed by Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley (1988) and refers to the historically situated, inconsistent, and often conflicted, common sense beliefs, values and practices of a culture. Ideologies circulate as contrasting and contradictory discourses and can produce opposing facets of

argument, which then in turn creates a dilemma for speakers by presenting options, positions or constraints and boundaries for choice. CDP's focus is on how people can actively negotiate these infinite ideological dilemmas, and what may influence them to identify with one option over another.

The third concept at the core of CDP is that of subject positions. A subject position can be understood as a speaker's "locations within a conversation" (Edley, 2001, p.210). Subject positions can be said to offer different, and crucially fluid, identities to the speaker, in accordance with whichever particular interpretative repertoire or discourse is being drawn on at the time. Similarly to DP, a CDP approach would be interested in how identities and attitudes are negotiated by the participants here, but it would examine how these relate to broader cultural discourses rather than how they are constructed in local interaction.

Ultimately, a modified analysis which incorporates both DP and CDP was utilised in this study to view how the members of the straight partners support group might construct roles, take up positions, or oppositions, and conduct interactions with each other and the interviewer at the local level of talk, but also paying attention to broader cultural discourses/repertoires that are explicitly or implicitly drawn on in the participants' talk (Davies & Harre, 1990; Parker, 1992). The analysis here drew on other discursive studies which similarly combined strands of DA to analyse data (Barnes & Moss, 2007; Coates, 2013; Tileaga, 2005; Willott & Griffin, 1997), as well as more purely DP studies (Abell & Stokoe, 1999; Beattie & Doherty,1995; Edwards & Potter, 1993), which informed the analysis of discursive devices in the participants' talk. Additionally, the analysis was informed by the approach adopted in the work of Edley and Wetherell (1997, 1999, 2001); Edwards and Potter (1992) and Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Wetherell and Potter (1988) in the use of the analytic concepts: interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions, utilised here to

examine the broader cultural discourses in play. These participants are in an unusual situation, an experience not shared by many other people. They are now however, part of a group who are sharing that experience, albeit in their individual ways. Therefore, the study was also interested in how the participants might accomplish identities in the context of the interviews (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995).

Discourse analysis tends not to emphasise topical focus in advance (Gee, 2014). The various discourses that were mobilised by the participants' experiences of being the straight partner or spouse, were the focus of the research and this is consistent with previous discourse analysis studies (Rogers, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The researcher addressed this by facilitating an environment in which participants could spontaneously address these issues rather than merely being asked to respond to a pre-specified list of topics influenced by the researcher's standpoint. Consistent with most discourse analysis work (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001) no pilot study was conducted.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The researcher was aware that this is a sensitive issue (Elliott, 2005), and consideration was given to any participant concerns about confidentiality and anonymity, as well as careful explanation of the research aims as well as distributing an information sheet about the project to interested participants (Appendix 3). With this in mind, all the research was conducted in line with the British Psychological Society's (2014) guidelines for working with human participants. Prior to commencing, ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics committee of the University of Roehampton (Appendix 1). There is a history of discourse analysis work into sensitive subjects such as racism (O'Driscoll, 2013), discrimination

(Tileaga, 2005); sado-masochism (Taylor & Ussher, 2001) and suicide (McDermott, Roen & Scourfield, 2008; Reeves, Bowl, Wheeler & Guthrie 2004). Therefore, the researcher had reason to believe that with careful attention to ethics it would be possible to carry out this study. Written informed consent was received from the participants, with emphasis given to their right to withdraw, before, during or after the research (Appendix 4). Before each interview the information and consent forms were revisited prior to signing, and the participants were invited to ask any questions. Each participant was carefully debriefed (Appendix 5). The data was all treated in accordance with the University of Roehampton's data storage guidance (Appendix 6).

Following Daley (2012) each participant was treated as an individual, and their emotional requirements during the interview were considered by the researcher on a case by case basis. Some participants were more emotional than others, and each participant had unique aspects of experience that affected them in different ways. The researcher endeavoured to remain alert and present to the participants' emotional states, facilitating a caring environment in the interview. Although some of the participants became tearful at points, they were all able to contain their emotional responses, and the feedback received from the group's coordinator was that the participants found the process to be helpful and, in some cases, therapeutic. As the topic is sensitive the researcher originally considered that a group setting, might be less disturbing for participants and enable them to be silent or speak as they wish without feeling the pressure to contribute that they might feel in an interview situation (Coates & Winston,1983; Kitzinger,1995). However, the people who agreed to participate - and who could not, for reasons of geography or choice take part in the groups - reported after the interviews, that they had felt comfortable speaking individually with the researcher.

During transcription of the interviews, the researcher made further decisions about anonymising material to protect the participants, as some people had given very detailed information about careers or social connections that could possibly be triangulated to identify them. For example, in two cases the researcher redacted a small amount of material, and in some instances place names were further anonymised by merely referring to them as “urban” or “rural”. Although some of the participants had stated that anonymity was not a concern for them, others had expressed a desire that their transcripts be anonymised as far as possible. The researcher made the decision then to anonymise all transcripts as far as possible, as it is increasingly viable because of social media and internet platforms to cross-link information which can lead to identification of participants (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015).

Chapter Four: Method

4.1 Introduction to method

This chapter presents the method employed to collect the data: covering participant recruitment, data collection, the process of the individual and group interviews and the recording and transcription of the corpus of data. The chapter will then move on to address the method of analysis selected to examine the data. Finally, there will be a reflective section on the chosen method.

4.2 Participants and sampling

Participants were recruited from a support group for straight partners with a network which is nationwide. The original group was created through a social media site and was founded by an initial three members who met through the United Kingdom branch of the Straight Spouse Network. Although the group was originally intended to be on-line only, it has also become a face to face support group, with a varying amount of group members meeting on a regular basis for social events or just to talk. The group has male and female members; however it is uncertain at this point what the ratio of male to female is, or how long each current member has been part of the group. It appears that members stay in the group anything from a few months to several years. As this is a closed group, and anonymity is guaranteed to members, the researcher was not provided with information such as the ethnic and cultural backgrounds, age range, gender division and geographical demographics of group members.

There were exploratory discussions via email (Appendix 2), and a meeting with one of the group's founding members/administrator, who indicated a strong interest in the research, and a willingness to help with recruitment from within the

group by posting the information about the study on the group's closed social media site (Appendix 3), as she believed that this would be of interest to many of the group's members who feel that their experiences as straight partners are ignored. The intention was to include only members who were active participants in the group and had had a minimum of two months membership of the group. This was to ensure that participants had time to make a considered choice about taking part in the research and did not feel that group membership was in any way contingent on participation in the study. It also meant that the group's administrator had some insight into each potential participant's current emotional state and levels of vulnerability. Other criteria for inclusion were that potential participants must have been married to, or in a long-term heterosexually intentioned relationship with their partner prior to their partner coming out as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The potential participants should be able to participate in a group or individual interview, taking into account any cognitive, emotional or language issues. No volunteer was excluded on any of the criteria listed above and all the participants had been a member of the group for a minimum of twelve months.

The final total of participants in the project was twelve. The total for individual interviews was six – three male and three female. The final total of participants for the group interviews was also six – all female. As one participant took part in both groups there was a group with three participants and a group with four participants. The participant information (Appendix 3) was posted onto the group's site on two occasions by the group administrator. Recruitment ended naturally once the participants who had volunteered were interviewed. There were two further volunteers for participation who were not interviewed as it proved impossible to co-ordinate a time to meet for interview. On the basis of the information that was received from the group's founder about the support group and its structure, initially the plan was to recruit participants from the London and South East region via the

Facebook group, simply because of geography. However, it transpired that initial interest in participation was limited, and any group member nationally who was willing to participate was considered for the study.

Although participation in the study was open to any member of the support group who wished to volunteer, the participants who did come forward were all white, between the ages of thirty-five and sixty, all were in some form of employment, many with professional qualifications, and although the relationship breakdown had caused considerable financial loss and in some cases hardship, the majority of this small sample owned their own homes. It has been suggested that demographic information should not be listed for participants in discourse analysis research, but instead only the contextual information to which participants orient should be presented (Schegloff, 1997; Wood and Kroger, 2000). In this case, some demographic information about participants is offered in order to give readers some sense of the people interviewed, and to be transparent about the possible limitations of the sample. The information provided is not intended to be treated as research findings "variables", and there is no suggestion about whether the demographics of the participants influenced their talk on the topic. As the researcher has no demographic information about the wider support group members, it may be that the sample says more about the type of people who volunteer for research studies than it does about people who join support groups for straight partners, or people who identify as straight partners.

4.3 Data Collection

The data was collected via a combination of opportunity sampling and snowball sampling following the initial interview. The data as a whole amounted to

approximately twenty-two hours which far exceeded the estimated twelve hours. The data was gathered from a mixture of six semi-structured individual interviews. The shortest individual interview was approximately one and a half hours long and the longest individual interview was approximately two and half hours long with a break. One group interview continued over a five hour period with breaks, and the second group interview was approximately two and half hours in duration.

The participants were invited from a nation-wide group that come together on an adhoc basis, and in various settings, for the common purpose of supporting each other and sharing understandings of their experience, and as such they are experts in their individual experience of this shared phenomenon. The support group members live in varying locations around the United Kingdom and there are some members in other European countries. As well as interacting online with each other, group members meet socially in smaller more local groups, and occasionally have meetings as a wider group. These larger meetings appear to be held in the south-east of England. All of the group members who participated in the research were based in the United Kingdom and at the very least knew each other on-line through the group, if they had not met in person. The group members who participated in the group interviews had all met in person prior to meeting for the group interviews.

The researcher also aimed to relate to each participant with as much openness and curiosity as possible. In this way, it was hoped to capture, as far as possible, the aspects of their experiences that were important to the people who agreed to take part in the study, rather than focusing upon aspects of the topic which the researcher could only conjecture would be useful. For this reason, no formal interview questions were introduced. However, an approach of this nature places demands of openness on the researcher, and in this study the breadth of the research question had a dual aspect. In some respects it facilitated the required researcher

openness to whatever the participants wanted to bring in their talk, however it also provoked some anxiety about what might emerge and how to best understand and relay that data. Foster and Bochner (2013) posit that in interview situations the participants' stories are being constructed interactively with the interviewer as the audience.

4.3.1 Focus group interview

Krueger and Casey (2009) suggest that if focus groups have specialised experiences or knowledge then they can be effective with three to four participants. Initially therefore, the researcher aimed to convene small groups comprised of four participants from the wider support group, with the meetings audio recorded for transcription and analysis (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). Methodologically, groups may present a more naturalistic setting for discourse than one to one interviews with a researcher (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997; Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991; Potter and Wetherell, 1995), and on that basis was the first choice of data collection. The purpose of the group was exploratory, attempting to generate knowledge in a relatively under-researched field. The use of an exploratory and phenomenological focus group as a method is posited by Calder (1977) as an approach which attempts to capture the point of view of groups' accounts of their experiences.

Kitzinger (1994) highlights a potential pitfall with focus group dynamics, in that some participant's opinions may be silenced, or the talk can go off topic. However, even silence, or silencing of topics may produce interesting data (Willig, 2013). Howitt and Cramer (2010) suggest that participating in a focus group can be empowering for participants, as they provide a collective means of addressing issues. In terms of methodology, discourse analysis is suited to the study of group interaction (Gee,

2014; Potter, 1997), and it enabled interrogation of both the resources that participants drew on to construct their talk in the context of the group setting, and what was activated in the accounts that they co-constructed. Two focus group interviews were convened with three and four female participants respectively. One group interview lasted approximately five hours and the second approximately three hours. The interviews were digitally audio-recorded for transcription.

While the researcher could see the value of capturing naturally occurring talk in the context of the support group for straight partners (Potter & Hepburn, 2008), this was not a possibility due to the closed nature of the support group, and the need to have informed consent from all participants. At the same time however, participants belonged to a support group that is currently part of their ordinary experience, rather than a group that has been devised solely for the purpose of data collection. The groups from which the data were derived were not entirely naturally occurring in that the researcher convened them. However, as no interview questions were used and the group members regularly met as part of a support group, the data was less "researcher-shaped" than might otherwise have been the case, and attempted to capture naturally occurring interaction which was explored with unmotivated looking (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). The focus groups in particular, had a social aspect to them in keeping with the nature of their usual meetings, which may in part account for the length of the group interviews. A rationale for including both individual interviews and focus groups in the study was to allow for differing contexts in which the participants' talk could be produced in the construction of accounts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

4.3.2 Individual interviews

It quickly became apparent that the recruitment process was going to be slower than envisaged and owing to the geographical locations of the first responders, the researcher took the decision to begin by individually interviewing these participants using a semi-structured interview. Although the researcher positioned herself as an interested but neutral audience for the participants in both the group and individual interviews, it is noted by the author that this interaction in itself will have influenced the co-creation of the data. Potter and Hepburn (2005) highlight several issues with qualitative interview pertinent to both the group and individual interviews conducted for this research. Beginning with the suggestion that the interviewer is frequently missing from transcribed extracts, the researcher took steps to mitigate against these issues. For example, in the current study the interviewer's intention was not to interrupt the participants' narrative unless necessary, but instances of interviewer interaction are recorded in some of the extracts and the interviewer's impact on the co-construction of the interview is acknowledged in the analysis. Furthermore, where the interviewer speaks or offers acknowledgement tokens in an extract, the interaction is examined, however, the focus of the study was the participants' own constructions of a specific experience. By outlining expectations and roles for the interviews the researcher made relevant the identities of interviewer and interviewee(s). In the transcripts each participant is named with a pseudonym, while the researcher is merely labelled as Interviewer, constructing the participants' personal identities only as relevant to the analysis (Edwards, 1998). The interviews in this study are conceptualized as an arena for identifying and exploring participants' interpretative practices and occasioned talk. Some of the analytic possibilities provided by interviews have been illustrated in previous discourse analyses (Billig, 1991; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

The sensitivity of the research topic for the participants had been addressed in ethics (previous chapter), however, Corbin and Morse (2003) suggest that unstructured and interactive interviews, may allow the participants to retain control over the process. Further to that line of argument, Hutchinson, Wilson, and Wilson (1994) posit that qualitative interviews may be beneficial to participants in the sense that they may give voice to the voiceless, promote healing, give some sense of purpose to participants, provide validation and self-acknowledgement, increase participants' self-awareness, foster a sense of empowerment and act potentially as a catharsis. The decision to begin with individual interviews proved to be worthwhile, as once the first two participants had completed the individual interview process they posted, of their own volition, feedback on the group's social media site which initiated a positive snowball effect in terms of volunteer participants. In total, three male and three female participants were interviewed individually. The individual interviews lasted between one hour forty-five minutes and two hours and thirty minutes each. Each interview was digitally audio-recorded for transcription.

4.3.3 Interview process

All willing participants contacted the researcher directly using the email address supplied on the information sheet (Appendix 2). Each interview was held in a place of the participant's choosing, in most cases their own homes. Informed consent was obtained prior to each interview (Appendix 3) and on completion of the interview each participant was fully debriefed (Appendix 4). In line with the stated methodological aims, the researcher encouraged the participants to control the length and content of the interview, and prior to each one, invited the participant(s) to ask any questions that occurred to them about the research, and the researcher's own interest in the topic. The participants were also invited to stop at any point they felt they had said everything they wanted to say on the topic (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

In the interviews and the groups, the participants did engage with the researcher as an interested and sympathetic audience. This was perhaps facilitated by the researcher prior to starting each interview, explaining that it may seem strange or even difficult to talk about the topic to a virtual stranger, and offering each participant control over the interview in terms of how much, and what, they might wish to share. She also explained her own position as a person who had not considered what their experience might be like, and her consequent shame at this oversight. Transparency felt important as these participants have all been subject to some deception by their partners with regard to this topic. No time restriction was imposed, and the participants were told that they had control of that, as it could be ten minutes or some hours according to their wishes. This felt important from an ethical point of view also, as these participants had all been subject to an experience in which they did not feel they had any control, and the researcher was sensitive to the needs of the participants in terms of guarding their autonomy in the interview situation. Mishler (1986) suggests that in unstructured interviews, free from interviewer limitation, that people will produce a storied reminiscence when asked to talk about an experience.

Again in response to Potter and Hepburn's (2005) concerns regarding semi-structured interviews various steps were taken in the interview process. At the outset, the researcher took some time to introduce herself to the participant(s) and invited them to ask her questions about her interest in the topic. In this way, it was hoped to address issues of stake for the researcher/interviewer (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The researcher's objective was to not intervene in the individual's narrative or the group conversations apart from explaining why she was there and what her interest was in their experiences of partner disclosure. Anything that the participants wanted to share about their partners' disclosures, or the consequences of these disclosures was welcomed, however the researcher did inform them that her particular interest was in their own experiences as a straight spouse or partner – instilling a "task"

understanding in the process as suggested by Potter and Hepburn (2005). The participants all belong to a support group for straight spouses and partners that is currently part of their ordinary experience, rather than a group that has been devised solely for the purpose of data collection. In this respect the study attempted to capture naturally occurring interaction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Although no formal questions were utilised, the interviewer/researcher occasionally prompted the participants if the topics of conversation had no reference to their experience as straight spouses/partners (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). If the participants were unsure where to start the researcher suggested some, or all of the topics below, around which the participants might begin to talk. However, these topics were always presented tentatively as possibilities only:

a. What happened after the disclosure by your gay/lesbian/bisexual partner; what this was like for you.
b. Current feelings about the disclosure
c. Changes in everyday life since partner's disclosure
d. Possible effects on current or future sexual relationships
e. Other peoples' reactions to partner's disclosure

The interview procedure for both the group interview and the individual interviews was loosely based on Wengraf and Chamberlayne (2006) Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) which suggests that it is possible to generate data by way of a BNIM interview but to use an alternative method of interpretation of that data. In biographic interviews participants talk about their lives in relation to the interests of the researcher. The interviews are provided with an initial direction but otherwise the narratives are spontaneous (Rapley, 2001). The aim of the interview technique is to capture both life-histories and episodic lived experiences (Wengraf & Chamberlayne, 2006). Edwards (1997, p.277), critiquing the use of BNIM interviews

for narrative analysis suggests that interviews substitute “got-up occasions for set-piece performances” for ordinary occasions where a person tells their stories, in effect ignoring the contribution of the interviewer. For the purposes of this study then, in line with the methodological approach, there was no assumption that the participants would simply report their experiences in a manner that was unaffected by the presence and co-construction of the researcher.

The researcher did not introduce new topics in the form of questions, but occasionally asked participants to clarify or expand on something they brought into the narrative. Active listening as used in BNIM interviews based on the person-centred principles of Rogers (2012) was employed by the researcher, in the form of non-verbal support: eye-contact, the adoption of a quiet listening posture, and non-intrusiveness. Verbal empathic support of the participants’ emotional processing in recall was also offered in every appropriate instance. The researcher endeavoured at all times to remain sensitive to each participant’s emotional state and energy levels and checked at natural break points in the conversation as to how the participant was finding the interview and if they needed to have a break, or to stop the interview. Care was taken to allow some space for silence at the end of each interview to ensure the participant(s) had an opportunity to reflect on whether they had said everything that they wished to share with the interviewer. At the end of each interview, the participant was asked how they were feeling, and they were encouraged read the debrief information (Appendix 4) which provided some resources for external support.

The participants were also encouraged to contact the researcher via email if they subsequently thought of something that they wished they had said, or not said, in the interview. This was initiated by the researcher to try and ensure that each participant felt some sense of completion in the interview, and that they felt some control over the process. Three participants sent emails following their interviews to

add small amounts of extra detail. In hindsight the researcher felt that the decision to travel to each participant and to interview them in a place of their choosing was empowering for them as it may have indicated that what they had to say was worth the researcher's time and effort in travelling to them. All but one individual was interviewed in their own home, and the group interviews were carried out in the home of one of the members of the group interview.

4.3.4 Audio-recording and transcription

The individual interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded on two digital devices with the participants' informed consent. The full corpus of the data was transcribed with words and pauses only noted, and then a version of Jefferson transcription notation, as posited by Wiggins, (2017), was utilised in the chosen extracts in the later coding stages (Appendix 7). The extracts have been transcribed to a more detailed level than the analysis finally required, as intonation, quiet speech, fast or slow speech and overlap was not considered in the analysis. However, the researcher believed that the level of transcription was necessary to give life and a vividness to the talk, which in turn enables the reader to engage with it in their own particular way. This is in response to Potter and Hepburn (2005, p.289) who draw attention to a need for transcription detail which they argue makes most apparent "the jointly constructed, socially engaged nature of what is going on". Similarly, each speaker is given separate lines for talk and each line of each extract is numbered for easy identification of the specifics of the talk.

4.3.5 Data Analysis

Analysis of the chosen extracts was conducted at a detailed level, although not to the level of conversation analysis, as suggested by Edley and Wetherell (1999, 2001). Familiarity with the interview material was developed initially through the reading and rereading of transcripts, and the initial analysis was conducted at a macro level (Nikander, 2008; Potter and Wetherell, 1987) with ideas around discursive issues being noted by hand on the transcripts. The readings enabled the researcher to immerse herself in the data to identify patterns, details and variation in the participants' talk which included, but was not limited to:

a. What the speakers produced as relevant in this account?
b. How the participants interpreted what was happening in the narrative?
c. Why they employed the particular detail/category at the points they did?
d. What were the participants orienting to in the talk?

Gee (2014) suggests seven building tasks of language that must be considered in any discourse analysis: significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, sign systems and knowledge. This was held in mind by the researcher when exploring how the participants used discursive resources to "do things" such as, construct identities, take up positions, or oppositions, and conduct interactions with each other in the light of their circumstances (Davies & Harre, 1990; Parker, 1992). In the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, but not limiting the analysis to particular topics, it was conducted holding in mind the possible emergence of discursive constructions of victimhood and accountability in the participants' talk. The researcher also hoped to see how available discourses, for instance, those around heterosexual marriage and sexual identity, might influence

the group members, bearing in mind there was also a possibility for positioning by the participants as “experts”.

The analysis progressed to coding the data with descriptors, by making notes on the transcripts of “what, how and when” was happening in the interaction (Wiggins, 2017, p. 118) to attempt to identify what was being constructed in the content of the talk, what the structure of the talk was, and how that talk was organized or situated. From there, some common discursive issues around which the participants organised and constructed their identities as straight partners, and the implications of that experience, were identified and noted. It was not possible within the scope of this study to fully explore all of the issues that emerged from the data. The discursive theme that was settled on after many re-readings of the data, was the issue of “establishing innocence”. The rationale for this choice was that it was a somewhat unexpected emergence and appeared in every account in some form whether explicit or implicit. Furthermore, it has not been addressed in any previous research on this topic. Once the issue was identified, the relevant sections of data were separated from the body of the whole data set and were more minutely examined for possible use as extracts. The extracts for inclusion here were then selected on the basis that they “spoke” for the participants as a whole and evidenced both consistency and variety in the chosen theme.

The analysis of this data focused both on thematic content and the discursive features of talk (Taylor and Ussher, 2001; Willig, 2013). This approach was consistent with the intended object of the project, which was to attempt to understand how the participants construct their experience of a partners’ disclosure as LGB through the discursive resources in their accounts, with the emphasis now having been established as identifying identity constructions of innocence. Informed by literature already outlined in Chapter 3, section 3.4.5., the analysis was conducted

utilising a hybrid approach incorporating discursive psychology with a critical discursive element. Focus was given to the local organisation of how participants manage this issue, and how they construct identities (Antaki & Widdicome,1998), or accomplish actions in their different accounts of their experiences (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017). Notice was taken of the function of similarities and variations within and between accounts, and the use of discursive devices in the selected extracts such as vivid description, vagueness, category entitlements, extreme case formulations and three-part lists to construct accounts (Edwards & Potter, 1992), as well as defensive or offensive rhetoric organisation of each account (Potter, 1996). This micro focus was shared with an interest in the broader social and cultural meanings, including interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1998), and subject positions (Davies & Harre, 1990; Wetherell, 1998), upon which the participants drew in constructing and negotiating new realities post-disclosure.

This study was also informed by some of the key principals of Parker's (1992) analytic approach, which focuses on the discourses available to people, and the way in which they then construct objects and subjects. In the analysis, action orientations are conceptualized as being both informed by available discursive constructions as well as informing the participants' choice of constructions. Edley and Wetherell (1999, p.182) suggest that people are "both the products and the producers of discourse". The rationale then for following this style of analysis was that it might allow for identification of the political and social implications of dominant ideologies, both explicit and implicit, and explore how these dilemmas may be reproduced or challenged in the participants' talk (Edley, 2001). In this sense the study was focussed on the content of the participants' talk, although this was not viewed as being produced neutrally by the participants without issues of stake or interest (Potter & Hepburn, 2008).

The findings presented in the next chapter are acknowledged to be the researcher's own constructions which were identified through an interaction with the data emerging from researcher and interviewees talk, and should be read as such, rather than as constituting any sort of final, absolute, definitive reading (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

4.4 Reflective box

Adopting a constructionist epistemology necessitates the stance that knowledge is not a passive reflection of gathered date, but that the role of the researcher is equally important in the creation of knowledge (Jorgensen, 2003). The transcription is an important part of the analytic process and as such I needed to be mindful of how my own experience was influencing the interaction with the data and any theoretical decisions about what was important to the analysis (Dunne, Pryer & Yates, 2005).

A research journal was kept from the outset of the study, to enable me to reflect on my own position with regard to the topic and how it changed during the research. Initially, in developing the idea for the study, I was conscious of feeling a certain amount of shame because of the realisation that I had never really considered the experience of this group of people. This seemed particularly pointed as much of my career had been spent working with gay and bisexual people and I had always considered herself to be very sensitive to the difficulties and dilemmas that had faced them in being able to acknowledge their sexualities. There seemed to be something blinkered about this, in view of meeting these participants. It felt like a spotlight in the theatre; if the spotlight is turned onto certain actors then the rest of the cast or stage

is cast into shadow and the audience's attention is not drawn there. This seemed to analogise what these participants experience as straight partners. There is quite rightly a focus on the concerns of people who identify as LGB, but a consequence of this focus appears to be that the experience of straight partners is not considered, or can be minimised. As I moved through the process of the research and met with the participants I also became conscious of a growing feeling of responsibility towards them. I experienced their accounts as moving and as people to be courageous and compassionate human beings. In order to keep them foregrounded as people as well as participants, I gave them all pseudonyms of people in my own life who I have great respect for. In all stages of the process that followed the interviews, I was aware of this responsibility to their humanity, and I often experienced anxiety that I was representing them in ways that they would hold to be authentic.

Chapter Five: Analysis

5.1 Outline of analysis

The analysis presented here draws on data from the six individual and two group interviews with participants. As discussed in the previous section, the analysis is grouped and presented under headings that reflect the both the local identity work carried out by the participants and the *fields of discourse* which emerged as informing the participants' rhetorical work in their narratives.

The term *field of discourse* has been used here as an umbrella term to illustrate some of the varied concepts around discourse which the researcher drew on in the analysis. For example, Potter and Wetherell (1987, 1988) conceptualise interpretative repertoires as script-like conversational frame works, or schema, constructed from specific sets of features, including the metaphors that are available to people. According to Edley (2001) interpretative repertoires, subject positions and ideological dilemmas are all important to discursive psychology because it is possible to gain some understanding of how talk both enables and limits the construction of the self and the other, by examining how we construct ourselves, others and our worlds in talk, and considering what these constructions do. The analysis attempted to identify both the discursive fields which the participants drew on in their accounts and to examine the rhetorical identity work which they performed within these accounts.

As suggested by Wiggins (2017) it is worth noting that this analysis offers only one of many possible interpretations of the ways in which the participants may construct their experiences as straight partners using the discursive tools available to them. The scope of this thesis inevitably necessitated focusing on one theme from a

selection of possible discursive issues. The analysis was approached with an "unknowing" and curious stance, and the issue or theme chosen was the one that emerged most vividly from the researcher's engagement with the data, and also because it emerged in unexpected ways. and it also focuses on how the participants position themselves in regard to, are positioned by, or perhaps even construct discourses at work in the accounts. The author took note of the six possible pitfalls of discourse analysis posited by Antaki, Billig, Edwards and Potter (2003) and attempted to firstly avoid summarising rather than analysing the data, including the avoidance of just listing or spotting rhetorical devices in the extracts. Secondly, the researcher kept in awareness her relationship to the data and her sympathetic view of the participants' experiences, and with that in mind tried to keep a constant "neutral" approach to the analysis, which included avoiding extrapolating findings to any broader context. Furthermore, the researcher tried to keep a balance between analysis and extract use, and an effort to avoid circular identification of discourses and mental constructs was made by staying as close as possible to the level of the text in the analysis.

This analysis is concentrated on addressing a particular discursive theme *'establishing innocence'* which emerged from the researcher's engagement with the transcripts. This theme has three elements or fields which have been named: *'constructing a victim identity'*, '*a question of knowledge*' and *'attributing blame'*. The fields do not appear as lone constructions at any point in the data, nor are the identity positions adopted by the individual participants maintained as discrete stances. Often all three discursive fields appear in an extract, and while this is addressed in the analysis, each extract was selected with a view to evidencing one element of the theme, and therefore concentrates of the nuances of that element. In addition, an over-arching discursive thread - *'heteronormative expectations'* – emerged which binds the three fields together by providing a context within which the participants

form discourses of innocence. In regard to innocence, discourses of heteronormativity potentially position the straight partner as being normative and in that sense not accountable for the partner's sexuality. This thread emerges both implicitly and explicitly throughout the data and in each field.

Although invited in each case by the researcher to talk about whatever aspects of the experience they wanted to, each participant chose to begin either with the disclosure and then to produce their storied accounts from that point, or in some cases to begin at the start of the relationship. Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that people produce stories to organise discourse, utilising a plot to organise and contextualise recalled events and actions. The participants appeared to utilise this device to construct a narrative about their personal experience, and to offer a social and cultural context within which to position their experience. The narratives were examined for performative functions in the situated accounts, and the interviews, both individual and group, provided a fertile arena for diversity between the participants in their individual constructions of their experience as a straight partner. This highlighted to the researcher the uniqueness of each person's story, and the many possible constructions of individual experience.

A narrative was used by each participant to construct their individual experience of partner disclosure. In many of the interviews the participants described and evidenced in their talk marital relationships that they constructed as happy, and only spoiled by the revelation or discovery of their partners' concealed sexuality. To the researcher, these narratives had a quality of what (Jackson, 1995; Leslie & Morgan, 2011) might be called a fairy-tale romance, albeit reversed, and beginning with a "happy ever after" construction of the relationship working towards the disclosure as the lone destructive event or sequence of events. All the participants produced accounts constructing themselves as having "normal" or reasonable

adverse reactions to the events. According to Potter and Hepburn (2008) this simultaneously constructs the disclosure or discovery of their partners' sexuality as having that effect, and their own identities as credible and rational people.

5.2 Establishing innocence

A discursive field which has been named *'establishing innocence'* was a central identity theme emerging from the data. This was both multi-faceted and complex with overlapping and contradictory elements. The participants were found to complete an array of discursive work in their accounts to construct this identity, which involved not only staking a claim to a victim position, but also staking a claim to their own unknowing of their partners' concealed sexuality, in tension with constructing an identity for themselves as a person of worth and intelligence. There was also extensive discursive work done in the accounts around blame. The three explicated elements of the field are linked together by a thread of ideological discourses centred around a dominant but invisible discourse of heterosexuality. The participants' accounts were examined for both consistency and variability. As addressed in the previous chapter, the researcher, as interviewer, both positioned herself in her talk, and was positioned by the participants' talk as a sympathetic audience (Edwards & Stokoe, 2004). It is possible that the participants constructed the researcher as an expert with a concomitant entitlement to hear and/or comment on the participants' accounts (Dickerson, 2012).

5.3 Constructing a victim identity

With the exception of one participant at one point in a group discussion (Group interview 2 p. 52) “we’re survivors we’re not victims anymore!”, no other participant explicitly used the term victim or survivor in their narrative. However, much rhetorical work was carried out in the talk to “implicitly” position themselves as victims and survivors of their experience. It is the management of the victim identity as part of a wider innocent identity that is the focus of this study. The participants all managed the tension between an agentic position and a powerless position in their accounts, and these findings are germane to the studies on victimhood discussed in the earlier literature review (Dunn, 2001, Holstein & Miller, 1997; Loseke, 2003).

5.3.1 Victim of motive

The participants all produced accounts staking a claim to being victims of their experiences. As indicated above, much of this work was done implicitly in their narratives; constructed through a range of rhetorical devices. The female participants all constructed this position by producing in their accounts descriptions of having been chosen because they were perceived as having qualities that facilitated or enabled their partners’ purposes. They also produced claims in their accounts of their partners having acted with intent - these claims were produced to warrant their stake to a victim position. However, similarly to previous studies outlined in the literature review (Holstein and Miller, 1997; Karmen, 2012; Leisenring, 2006; Loseke, 2003) this was not always a clear-cut process. Many participants simultaneously drew from multiple discourses in their identity work, and their identity claims shifted throughout the interviews.

Extract 1.

In this extract from all-female group interview (One) the participants have been giving their accounts of marriage prior to the disclosure, and Belinda had been giving an account of the many years of financial support she had offered to her spouse as he built up his business

1	*Interviewer*	*The way that sounds is as if you were the rock in*
2		*a way [addressing Belinda] Quite dynamic↑*
3		*[Interviewer addresses Annabel] Did you feel that*
4		*way as well?↑*
5		
6	*Annabel*	*Lesser so for the money, but definitely↑ I think*
7		*one of the things that I said to (A's husband)*
8		*within thirty six hours of discovering what was*
9		*going on was "you chose me on purpose↑" and I*
10		*(..) maybe that's not true↑ but I couldn't get it out*
11		*of my head I kept saying to him "You picked me*
12		*on purpose=you knew through your [work]*
13		*background and my dysfunctional family you*
14		*knew that I would be able to cope with this↑ you*
15		*knew I would get through this I hate you for (.)*
16		*for doing this to me" I said "But you've picked me*
17		*on purpose of all the girls↑"*
18		
19	*Belinda*	*I was picked on purpose as well↑*
20		
21	*Catherine*	*>That's what you read about the narcissistic*
22		*personality (.) takes on a carer because they need*
23		*somebody who will one look after them<↑, to look*
24		*up to them praise them for what they do in life*
25		*and just be there↑ as their rock and (C's*

26 *husband) has <u>always</u> said to me <"You were the*
27 *stronger one, you've always been the stronger*
28 *one">*

Responding to a formulation from the interviewer of Belinda's description, and a non-verbal cue to Annabel to give her own account of the support she may have offered her husband (Extract 1 lines 1-4), Annabel corroborates Belinda's account, but also resists the construction of being a financial support to her husband. This acts to create a consensual formulation with Belinda, but also to position Annabel's experience as being individual, not like other peoples'. A temporal description (Extract 1 line 7-8) *"within thirty-six hours of discovering what was going on",* creates a division between before and after the disclosure. This stakes a claim to Annabel's un-knowing of her husband's sexuality prior to disclosure, and simultaneously stakes a claim to her agency. She confronted her husband with her thinking around her new knowledge and this positions her as a thinking person. She demonstrates her working out in hindsight what her husband's motives for marriage had been, this constructs herself firmly in the sentence as the victim.

Annabel then moves on to make and repeat a claim that her husband was knowing in his behaviour which acts to evidence her stake as unknowing and therefore positions her as a victim of his actions (Buttny, 2008). Annabel softens or hedges this by constructing herself as a rational thinker with her assertion that this is not necessarily true (Extract 1 line 9-10). This position then mitigates her being unable to 'unknow' the thought (Extract 1 line 10). It positions her accusation of her husband as being external to herself. She couldn't *"get it out of her head".* She then bolsters her innocence stake with the assertion that she was chosen specifically, which positions her spouse as both knowing and predatory. Wooffitt (1992) suggests

active voicing such as found in Annabel's account in Extract One, can be employed by speakers when formulating an account of extraordinary events which may be treated with scepticism by the audience. Here Annabel employs it to lend veracity to the account by providing details of the actual words said as opposed to merely offering a gloss on the interaction.

Annabel contrasts her victim claim with a construction of herself as a survivor of prior experiences (Extract 1 lines 10-14), and then deploys this to indicate to the listeners that it was this identity that was instrumental in her being chosen by her husband. He is positioned as blamed because of his knowledge of her background. Belinda and Catherine corroborate Annabel's account with their agreement. This mirroring consensus constructs an account that is difficult for the listener to undermine (Dickerson, 2000). They are creating a hypothesis where they were not in control of the situation because they were non-agentic, so therefore they cannot be held responsible.

Buttny (1993) posits that accounts arise from a distinctively human capacity to be blamed and to be held responsible for our actions and indicate a perceived deviation from some shared code of conduct. Both Annabel and Catherine employ repetition in this extract to explicitly frame their claim to innocence with Annabel using the words *"on purpose"* three times (between lines 9-16) when referring to her husband's action in selecting her. This bolsters her positioning of him as acting knowingly. She also categorises herself as a *"girl"* rather than a woman, (Extract 1 line 16) warranting her claim to innocence. The category 'girls' is likely to have category bound formulations associated with it. This might arguably include normative assumptions about youth, and a lack of sexual experience or knowledge being a feature of youth (Edwards, 1998). This implies a violation of that innocence by her husband in his actions. Belinda in turn corroborates Annabel's claim which

formulates the husbands' behaviour as having a pattern, this is something that "*they*" do (Extract 1, line 18).

Catherine takes this further by deploying a descriptive category categorising (Extract 1 lines 20-24) the disclosing spouses (Extract 1 line 21) *"they"* as narcissistic, suggestive of a stereotype of personality traits, and then externalising her claim by drawing on written evidence (Extract 1 line 20) *"that's what you read*". Categorising the disclosing partners in this way allows the talk to work up a group membership to which they belong – one that is different to the straight partners (Edwards, 1998). She produces an account of the participants having been chosen because of the partners' narcissistic personalities. It could be viewed as blaming without being seen to blame in that it displays an awareness of the partners' predicament as having a narcissistic personality, which may mitigate a moral judgement of their actions while preserving the participants' accounts of their victimhood.

In the final four lines of (Extract 1) Catherine deploys a three-part list augmenting her claim to the disclosing spouses' narcissism. Jefferson (1990) identifies the importance of three part lists as a rhetorical device that positions device that positions accounts as persuasive and complete. Catherine repeats *"stronger"* twice in an active voicing statement (Wooffitt, 1992) which also utilises extreme case formulation *"always"* to formulate the extent of her husband's accountability in their experience, his implied 'weakness' in contrast to her strength, and to inoculate her stake in her identity as a strong, capable person. Pomerantz (1986) suggests that when we are trying to justify a claim, as Catherine is here, we draw on extreme points of description (Potter, 1996) to bolster our claim.

Extract 2

Shortly after (Extract 1) in the transcript the participants in Group 1 discuss how they met their husbands

1	*Belinda*	*We started going out in the summer↑ (.) and we*
2		*went over to (anonymized location) New Year and*
3		*he was the <u>first</u> person (.) he told me that he*
4		*<u>loved</u> me↑ and he told me by September that he*
5		*<u>knew</u> he was going to spend the rest of his life*
6		*with <u>me</u>↑ >I <u>think</u> I was a mother figure I think I*
7		*was replacement to <u>his</u> mother↑ I think I was*
8		*<u>stability</u> I think it was because I came from a*
9		*strong family background↑ I was a strong person↑*
10		*and I had my <u>own</u> university course which was*
11		*leading to a (anonymized) degree, so I became a*
12		*(anonymized profession)↑< I had a <u>path</u> I <u>knew</u>*
13		*where I was heading↑ and I think I was a strong*
14		*person who could be like his mother but be a*
15		*background to him and a support to him↑*

The detail in Belinda's talk in (Extract 2) establishes credibility through her vivid depiction of events, creating a perceptual re-experiencing for the audience, while at the same time making it difficult to undermine her account (Edwards & Potter, 1992). It explicitly attributes blame to Belinda's husband as it positions him as acting with intent, having driven the relationship over a period of time, and having it planned out, thus positioning her as innocent. Potter (1996) illustrates the use of time as a critique of others, drawing on Pomerantz's study on discourses in legal settings where descriptions of time are used to underscore the facticity of accounts and to elicit or express sympathy for the speaker. Belinda constructs evidence of her innocence with repetition of his reported talk (Extract 2 line 3-4) *"he told me that he loved me",*

"he told me by September". This performs the dual function of constructing Belinda as a person with reasonable and ordinary expectations for her relationship and positions her husband as the driving force in moving the relationship forward quickly. Belinda constructs herself as passive in this, as a victim of her husband's actions.

In extract (1) and (2) Belinda and Annabel both work up their justifications of why their husbands chose them as partners. There is a sense of difficulty as they struggle to balance the non-agentic identity they have invoked in the narrative with an alternative identity as an agentic being. There is a working up of identity by all the participants as strong people in (Extracts 1,2,3) which is contradictory to the non-agentic position, but the contrast acts to support their production of themselves as innocents (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). They evidence this with information about their education, and both difficult and strong family backgrounds, drawing on implicit repertoires of what constitutes families (Extract 2 lines 6-9) and implicit repertoires of being a person of worth by virtue of education (Extract 2 lines 9-13).

There is also a positioning by Belinda of herself as knowing, which she evidences in her explanation of how her husband chose someone like his mother to be supportive of him. She repeats this claim three times in the extract (Extract 2 lines 6,7,14). She describes "maternal qualities" to legitimize her identity as a "good" partner, which is woven into her argument for innocence. It also operates to position her husband as someone who was not looking for a sexual partner, but rather a maternal replacement – he was not behaving as could ordinarily be expected. This is balanced with three repetitions of *"I think"* (Extract 2 lines 5-6,7,13) which stakes a claim to Belinda being a rational thoughtful person, but simultaneously inoculates her stake by distancing her from "knowing" what her husband's motives were and preserving her position as innocent. There is also an implicit claim to something haven been taken from Belinda by her husband's deception (Extract 2 lines 12-13) *"I*

had a path, I knew where I was heading!". The extract ends with Belinda positioning herself as being a *"background"* and a *"support".* This works to convey a sense of inequality or unbalance in the relationship, with her husband's needs foregrounded.

In (Extract 3 & 4) Claire constructs her experience of being chosen in two different ways. She constructs an account which balances her positions as both knowing expert and unknowing victim with regard to her husband's motivations in choosing her as a partner.

Extract 3

The following extract is taken from an individual interview with Claire who prior to this extract has been giving an account of how she discovered that her husband was having a long-term sexual relationship with a man during the course of their marriage:

1 *Claire:* *I thought about everything↑ obviously I've had a*
2 *long time to think about it↑ its ten years now in*
3 *April there↑ >it was ten years since the day↑ I*
4 *found out< and I felt (...) °for a long→ time° almost*
5 *like I had been groomed↑ like a pedophile grooms↑*
6 *a child with the lies↓ putting me in a certain*
7 *position↑ and telling me certain things to get me to*
8 *behave in a certain way↑*

Claire employs an extreme case formulation in (Extract 3 line 1) (Pomerantz, 1986). She has thought about *"everything".* This acts to position her as a thinking and reasonable person. She also utilises a consensual formulation to add weight to this argument, involving the interviewer when she uses the word "*obviously*". As with Belinda in (Extract 1), Claire also invokes the temporal aspect "*ten years*" (Extract 3, line 2) and repeats it (Extract 3, line 3), creating further evidence of her knowingness

now being because of the amount of time she has to had to consider the experience. It also highlights the costs to Claire, it has taken her this long to be able to move on from the experience. This temporal aspect also acts to inoculate her formulation of her husband as predatory in choosing her (Potter, 1996). She draws on a common-sense repertoire of pedophilia in her descriptive statement. This positions her explicitly as having been a victim and her husband having been an abuser. Claire draws on a category bound formulation of a child as a victim of a predator (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). As seen in Extract 1, this kind of categorisation is likely to have normative assumptions of innocence associated with it. She specifically targets her husband's deception as the abusive element *"the lies"* (Extract 3 line 5). Claire also constructs herself as non-agentic in this categorization (Extract 3 line 5-7) *"putting me", "telling me", "getting me",* adding weight to her claim to victimhood.

.

Extract 4

Having described earlier in her account why she had been attracted to her husband when they met, Claire now introduces a claim to her need for her husband to answer questions about why he married her. She locates the power with him, positioning herself as helpless, while balancing this with her claim to identity as a thinking, knowledgeable person:

1	*Claire:*	*I think when the time's right over the next few*
2		*weeks (.) months↑ I'm (..) I would like to ask him*
3		*those questions↓ see if he would answer them*
4		*"Why me↑ Why did you marry?" I pretty much*
5		*know why but (.) in a way I suppose it's*
6		*flattering I can take the positives and the*
7		*negatives out of it↑ the positives are (.) he felt he*
8		*wanted to be married >we got on really well< we*

9 *were very mm compatible↑ mm (.) <u>obviously</u> he's*
10 *thought to himself "<u>Well</u> if It's going to be*
11 *<u>any</u>body↑ it might as well↑ be somebody I'm*
12 *going to get on really well with↑" [laughs] >and*
13 *at least↑< you know (.) so it wasn't the bad*
14 *mouth like some I've read that where they blame*
15 *the <u>wife</u> and they get the blame and make them*
16 *feel bad about them<u>selves</u>*

Claire employs a temporal element (Extract 4 line 1) which constructs a somewhat contradictory or conflicted position of agency, which arguably could be analysed in one of two ways resonant with Harré's (1995) argument that *being agentic* is something that people *do* with words in talk.

Claire is positioning herself both as being able to choose the time to ask, an agentic position, and she is positioning herself as helpless in that she has to wait until he will answer the questions (Extract 4 line 3) *"see if he would answer them".* She uses repetition to make this point *"why"* (Extract 4 line 3-4). She then also resists the non-agentic position by staking a claim to her agency in that she states she does *"know why"* her husband chose to get married, this she also makes a claim for herself as a reasonable and fair person who can see the complexities of the situation (Extract 4 line 4). Claire constructs marriage in the extract (4), drawing on an implicit heteronormative discourse of marriage, as being between a man and a woman. She employs active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992) to draw the listener into a consensual formulation of a reasonable explanation for her husband's behavior (Extract 4 lines 5-6). She stakes a claim to the quality of their relationship prior to disclosure (Extract 4 lines 7-8) *"we got on really well"* which is deployed to mitigate her own accountability. The extract also draws on an implicit discourse of marriage that

includes but is not restricted to 'getting on well'. Claire's evaluative statement *"obviously"* (Extract 4 line 9) constructs a common-sense formulation of her spouse's actions in marrying her which draws the listener into consensus. In the same sentence active voicing adds substance to her husband's actions in choosing to marry her. (Extract 4 line 9-11) *"Well if it is going to be anybody it might as well be".* On initial examination this appears to position Claire's husband as agentic, having the power to choose, however a deeper analysis suggests Claire is constructing his position as one of limited choice to choose other than a heterosexual partner. This sentence is followed by a short laugh from Claire. This could be heard as an ironic device, Claire constructing the sentence not only as an understanding of her husband's powerlessness, but also as a complaint about his treatment of her (Edwards, 2005).

Claire manages the dilemma of claiming a victim position, while maintaining her position as a compassionate and thinking person (Edwards 2005). The last part of the extract acts to position disclosing partners as to blame, and draws on a consensual formulation (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007), generated by evidencing the support group, about how disclosing partners behave to validate her claim (Extract 4 line 11-15). Claire employs a colloquialism (Extract 4 line 12) *"the bad mouth"* which invites a commonsense consensual formulation of blame with the listener. Potter (1996) suggests that the deployment of a vague description such as this can protect the speaker's claim from undermining by the audience. This evaluative statement acts in two ways: first, disclosing partners are constructed as having a "general" behaviour of blaming their spouses – it "others" the disclosing partners – the claim being made is that this is how they all behave. Claire's positioning of her husband as an exception to this behaviour underscores and adds weight to this evaluation: the exception proving the rule. Secondly, the evaluation implies that blaming the

disclosing partners is warranted, and implicitly operates to allocate a victim identity to the straight partners.

5.3.2 Victim of circumstance

There was a variation in how the male participants constructed their partners' disclosures. These were constructed as having been instances of change occurring during the relationship, a "third" factor, positioning their disclosing partners' sexuality as outside of their control. This analysis is not examining gender differences in constructions of the experience, however it should be noted that, none of the three male participants constructed themselves as having been chosen deliberately by their partners, although the partners are positioned as active agents in the relationship. In this way the male participants manage the dilemma of adopting a helpless position but resisting a victim identity.

Extract 5

This extract is taken from an individual interview with Brian who near the beginning of his interview has chosen to describe his marriage in a response to a request form the interviewer to start where he would like, in effect setting a scene for the disclosure that followed.

1	*Int*	*You were just saying that perhaps you would tell*
2		*me a bit of the* back*ground*↑ *hmm*
3		
4	*Brian*	*Yeh, I was with (name)(.) my now ex-wife we*
5		*were together for about five years (..) and then I*
6		*lived in this house mmm for (.) it was aah my*
7		*house*↑ *then she moved in with me*↑ *and then after*
8		*five years we decided to get married (.) we got*

married (.) <u>happily</u> so I <u>thought</u>↑ we had a big wedding you know↑ with the white dress and the rest of it↑ <u>great</u> <u>day</u> still <u>was</u>↑ I suppose↑ °though kind of painful to look at the pictures° (..) we (..) I'm always trying to work out <u>what</u> part of this next part had to do with what she did↑ >because we went through a real stressful time where she couldn't have kids↑ and it was basically her↑ that couldn't have the kids< which (.) looking back now I don't think I knew <u>how</u> <u>painful</u> that must have been for her <u>but</u> (..) we went through quite a <u>stress</u>ful time with that↑ >and she went on some tablets to try and ovulate and all the rest of it< <u>and</u> there was a couple of times where we didn't (..) there was a lot of pressure↑ on us to have this child <u>and</u> to sleep with each other and all the rest of it↑ and there was a couple of times when it got a bit <u>pressurised</u> (.h) She had it in her head that I didn't <u>want</u> a child and I <u>did</u>↑ but I don't know quite↓ (..) it was a real sort of <u>boiling</u> pot thing waiting to sort of happen↑ em

Brian gives the detail that his ex-wife moved in with him (line 6-7 of Extract 5) evidencing that that this was her choice, positioning her as agentic, and the initiator. The detail about the house being his constructs his wife's actions as deliberate, while also implicitly displaying his ability to provide for a partner. This acts to pre-position him as not to blame, it was his ex-wife's choice to move in with him (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009), and positions him as a worthy mate.

In highlighting his non- initiation of the relationship Brian simultaneously gives an account of not initiating the "problem". The temporal detail about the length of time that they were together (line 5 of Extract 5) is also presented as evidence that this was a considered relationship, and reflects a temporal invocation as critique of other (Potter, 1996) similarly deployed by the female participants in Extracts 2 and 3. In the statement about the nature of the wedding *"the white dress and all the rest of it"* (line 10 of Extract 5) draws Brian is telling the listener that this was a "proper" marriage with the accompanying symbols. This construction appears to be drawn on again as in recounting the couple's difficulties with conception Brian utilises his talk to present a version of himself as rational and thoughtful when drawing on a taken for granted discourse that heterosexual marriage will include children. He also locates the childlessness problem in his wife's domain (Extract 5 line 15-16) "*it was basically her who couldn't have the kids".* He deploys the stress caused by the fertility issues in mitigation for the implied lack of sex in the relationship (Extract 5 line 21-22) *"And there was a couple of times when we didn't (..)".* It is constructed as a reasonable assumption for him that the lack of sex was because of this stress, rather than his wife's concealed sexuality, thereby staking a claim to his 'not-knowing' and by extension his innocence in the matter. He uses a self-initiated type of repair construction (Kitzinger, 2012) to both add more detail to his position as a thinking person and his claim to innocence.

Brian also employs an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) to emphasise his claim to being rational and thoughtful: *"always trying to work out"* (Extract 5 line 12-13), while positioning his spouse as blamed *"what she did"* (Extract 5 line 13-14). Brian also positions himself as thoughtful and compassionate in his reflective statement, *"looking back now I don't think I knew how painful that must have been for her"* (Extract 5 lines 17-18). The extract concludes with Brian hedging or softening his claim (Extract 5 line 26-27) *"but I don't know quite"*, which is followed by

a vivid metaphor of a *"boiling pot".* Edwards (1999) posits that metaphors describing contained heat are more passive and experiential. Brian utilises an induced heat metaphor here to warrant his stake to innocence by apportioning blame for the break-up of the marriage to external factors that neither he nor his wife could control, which acts to warrant his claim to victimhood (Edwards, 1999).

5.4 A question of 'knowing'

A second element in the participants' constructions of innocence was deployed by the participants in their narratives around the theme of knowing or not knowing about partners' concealed sexuality which was touched on in (Extract 3). This was complicated for the participants to negotiate as knowing compromises the victim identity, and therefore the broader construction of themselves as innocent.

5.4.1 Really knowing?

Earlier in his interview Brian spent some time producing an account of his marriage as happy. This effectively sets the scene for the interviewer and creates a contrast between Brian's understanding of his marriage and the impact of the disclosure that follows in (Extract 6).

Extract 6

1	*Brian*	*Surreal = it was such↑ it was so unbelievable that*
2		*this woman that I knew↑ was doing what she was*
3		*doing (..) it had to be something (.) like that↑ cos*
4		*what else could it be↑? and that kept me (..) I*
5		*think# if I didn't have that to hold onto that*
6		*denial that first year and a bit (.) I don't think I*

would have been here↑ <I think I would have topped myself>

Interviewer *Really↑?*

Brian *<u>Yes</u> because the <u>only</u> thing that was keeping me going was thinking↑ "When is something going to happen↑?" I <u>know</u> that sounds really mad but my head was <u>so</u> messed up (.) that (...)*

Int *that was your <u>lifeboat</u> in a way that idea↑?*

Brian *YES↑ that idea that maybe this was all some <u>elaborate hoax</u> or something↑ and this was some sort of (...) because it couldn't be↑ (..) <u>how</u> <u>could</u> the woman that I had slept with↑ been <u>so into</u> it with↑ (...) <u>knew</u> me and I knew <u>her</u> (..) could go off with a <u>woman</u>? <u>Don't</u> get me wrong↑ I <u>mean</u> we'd spoke about things like that sexually in the bedroom↑ you know↑ about what are peoples' fantasies and all the rest of it↑ >but she had <u>never</u> showed <u>any</u> sign of <u>going</u> "Well actually you know↑ < (.) if I had been going to swingers' clubs like some people do↑ well fair <u>enough</u> if that floats your boat or whatever↑< you <u>could</u> then turn round and <u>go</u> "<u>well</u>↑ there was a <u>bit</u> of an indication there <u>wasn't</u> there↑" (...) <<u>nothing</u> absolutely <u>nothing</u>↑*

Brian constructs his relationship with his ex-wife as having features that are conventionally associated with intimate relationship – for example each partner has an expectation of "knowing" the other (Extract 6 line 1-3). Prior to (Extract 6) Brian has been describing how he enjoys a particular TV show which uses illusion and psychological techniques to carry out hoaxes on unsuspecting audience members. He described having a fantasy that his partner's disclosure was such a hoax. The extract is also employed as an evaluative assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) of what was happening, which mitigates Brian's not-knowing and highlights the potential destructive effects of his having to "know" what was happening as made relevant in (Extract 6 line 6-7) *"I think I would have topped myself".* He employs extreme case formulation with regard to holding the belief about the experience being a hoax *"the only thing that was keeping me going"* (Extract 6 line 11-12), this presents not knowing as essential for his survival which provides evidence of his innocence. This implicitly categorises the disclosure as destructive, and also positions him as helpless or non-agentic in the experience.

However, Brian also resists these positions of with constructions of himself as thinking and rational, using repetition of *"think*" (Extract 6 Lines 4,6 and 7), and in his evaluative statement *"I know that sounds really mad"* (Extract 6 line 13) he wards off any potential gloss on his account as fantastical with a stake inoculation, and works to help Brian achieve the social action of being credible and believable (Potter, 1996). The repetition of "think" could also be seen as a hedge, or softener, distancing Brian from explicit complaints about what was happening (Drew, 1998). From (Extract 6 line 18) onwards Brian expands his account, perhaps as a counter claim to the interviewer's reflective enquiry (Extract 6 line 9). The use of *"don't get me wrong"* (Extract 6 line 23) at the beginning of the statement that he and his wife had discussed sex other than heterosexual monogamous sex is utilised more to corroborate Brian's

claim to rationality, and to bolster his claim to ignorance of his wife's sexuality rather than to manage any variability in his account (Wetherell & Potter, 1988).

Brian also draws on an implicit notion of sexuality as being typically visible in behaviour *"never showed any sign"* (Extract 6 line 26) in the construction of his innocence. If there were no clues, then he could not have known. Brian also stakes an implicit claim to a heterosexual monogamous identity in his statement about swingers clubs (Extract 6 lines 27-29) *"if that floats your boat or whatever"* being the operative fragment: effectively separating himself from people who do go to this kind of club, while positioning himself as tolerant of this but simultaneously "othering" the behaviour. He employs both active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992) and extreme case formulation to add weight to his position as unknowing (Extract 6 lines 27-32), which also acts to position his wife as the transgressor.

5.4.2 A compromised knowing

There was variation in the accounts of knowingness and management of potential dilemmas of stake. Corinne produces an account where she manages the problem of knowing there were clues to her husband's concealed sexuality, but being simultaneously rendered unknowing.

Extract 7

Corinne, a participant in group interview 2 has been describing to the group what had initially attracted her to her husband, who she subsequently discovered was gay and having relationships with men.

Corinne: *I mean↑ who wants to go (.) "right that's it my marriage is over↑" having given up everything I'd*

look such a fool↑ I always from the beginning↑ I had that doubt about him and the way he dressed with his pointy shoes and his (inaudible words) sharp you know↑ he was always immaculate↑ smelt nice↑so different↑(.) >he was so different to anyone I had ever been out who was just a normal guy I suppose<↑but this was so different he felt so special↑he was charming and attentive (.h)

Corinne positions herself as having made sacrifices for this marriage in an extreme case formulation (Extract 7 line 2) *"having given up everything",* she deploys an evaluative assessment which incorporates both active voicing and a rhetorical question. Pomerantz (1984) suggests that an evaluative assessment is produced on the basis of the speaker's orientation to knowledge or experience. Here Corinne invites the listener to a consensual formulation. She positions herself as the one who would be judged rather than her husband (Extract 7 line 2-3) *"I'd look such a fool".* This part of the account is deployed in mitigation for Corinne's subsequent admission of some suspicion about her husband's sexuality.

Corinne explicitly adopts a knowing position by employing an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), (Extract 7 lines 3 and 6). She *"always"* had a doubt about her husband. She draws on a common-sense formulation of a gay male sexuality being visible in good grooming and presentation (Extract 7 lines 4-7). She employs repetition of *"so different"* on three occasions (Extract 7 line 6-9) drawing the listener's attention to this difference. She also specifies that he was different from other men she had dated who were *"normal"* (Extract 7 line 8). She manages the dilemma of stake in knowing versus not-knowing by deploying mitigating evidence in her defence. In (Extract 7 line 7-10) Corinne utilises an evaluative statement; *"this*

was so different, he felt so special, he was charming and attentive". This positions Corinne as an 'ordinary' person who is naturally looking for these romantic and desirable qualities of uniqueness in a partner.

This addresses the two problems in Corinne's account. Firstly the admission that she did spot that there was something different about her husband from the start, and it answers an implied question about why she didn't take action then. It acts to position her husband as "not-normal", in acting knowingly, and therefore blamed. In constructing her ex-husband in a way that is consistent with ideal or romanticised versions of a perfect partner Corinne may be drawing on a discourse of romantic love. The ideal partner qualities of *difference* were the attractive thing to Corinne, which categorises the differences as *not-normal* but desirable. It also stakes a claim to her innocence, as her ability to see the difference between him and heterosexual men was compromised by his attentive and seductive behaviour.

5.4.3 Trying to know

Other participants constructed accounts in which they describe attempting to find out what was happening, either at the time or in hindsight. This simultaneously works to categorise them as both thinking and resourceful people, and to mitigate their not knowing preserving the innocent identity.

Extract 8

Prior to this extract Jenny had been giving an account of how she found out by accident that her husband was having relationships with men, when he accidently sent an explicit text meant for one of these men to a family member. She described how she began to monitor his phone and lap top and put together clues about the

identity of one of the men when her husband refused to give her any more information.

1	*Jenny*	*>I know you shouldn't↑ and it's awful and it's a*
2		*horrible thing to do, but I actually took*
3		*photographs of skype conversations<↑ (.) so I've*
4		*got that evidence and (.) eh but he would never*
5		*disclose "I'm not talking about it↑ I'm not talking*
6		*about what I do↑ >blah, blah, blah blah, blah↑<". But the way the conversation was, it was*
7		
8		*obviously gay↑ I learnt a whole new language (.)*
9		*>and coffee is not a drink<↑, I know that now*
10		*[joint laughter] >Stop for coffee on the way up↑<*
11		*Yeah well I know that's not coffee↓ I learnt a*
12		*whole new kind of language (.) and also there was*
13		*a bit of BSM in there as well↑ Em (.) so I've*
14		*learnt a lot about that↑ and I think (.) <it's just*
15		*that you have this automatic reaction> to kind of*
16		*dig a bit deeper↑ and find out what it really*
17		*is=are you imagining things? and that hopefully*
18		*you will wake↑ up one day and it will all be gone*
19		*it's just a bad dream*
20		
21	*Int*	*Can't be real? ↑*
22		
23	*Jenny*	*Yeah it's not real and you know it's (...) and these*
24		*things to me were so extreme (.) I(.) probably, not*
25		*probably very naive (a) you never think it is going*
26		*to happen to you↑ and (b) what's the extent of*
27		*it↑?*

In the extract Jenny manages a dilemma of positional extremes between unwarranted suspicion and passivity with regard to knowing about her husband's concealed sexuality. The extract begins with a disclaimer as Jenny pre-empts any blame directed towards her by positioning herself as someone who knows that looking at other peoples' correspondence is not socially sanctioned behaviour. She uses an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) to evidence this to the listener. (Extract 8 line 1-2) *"awful", "horrible thing to do!".* She follows the disclaimer with three mitigating *"buts"* (Jefferson, 1990). Firstly, she needed evidence of what he was doing, and secondly he wouldn't have admitted it. Thirdly, the information that the conversation was *"gay"* (Extract 8 line 7) is deployed as reasonable grounds for her behaviour. She bolsters the second mitigation with active voicing which adds verisimilitude to her account. The deployment of the colloquial *"blah, blah"* (Extract 8 line 6) indicates firstly to the listener that Jenny's husband is someone who would both refuse to talk about his sexuality and someone who would continue to do so. Secondly, it invites a consensual formulation with the listener that her husband's refusal is not of worth. It can be discounted, which positions Jenny as not blamed for wanting to know about his sexual behaviour and having been forced into investigating it. Overall in the account, Jenny constructs herself as acting reasonably given the evidence.

From (Extract 8 line 7) Jenny categorises herself as newly knowledgeable about the 'otherness' of her husband's behaviour. She employs repetition to reinforce the foreignness of this behaviour in her witness account of the other 'reality' she discovered (Extract 8 line 7-13). It is another *"language"* that she has had to learn, and therefore could not have been expected to know previously. The shared laughter (line 9) with the interviewer acts as a consensus of Jenny's ironic device (Extract 8 line 8-10) *"coffee is not a drink",* which is repeated to add weight to Jenny's position as a thinking and rational person and to bolster the implication that Jenny's husband

has joined a group which skews expected norms. In a similar way to Brian in (Extract 6) Jenny draws on a heteronormative repertoire of sexual behaviour, the addition of the information about bondage and sado-masochistic content in her husband's communications is offered to ensure a positioning of her husband as deviant and "othered", rendering her account more difficult for the audience to undermine. This simultaneously, and implicitly, positions Jenny as unknowing and naïve about these practices.

Jenny draws on a common-sense discourse of truth seeking to justify her investigations. She describes it as *"an automatic reaction"* (Extract 8 line 14). This positions her behaviour as ordinary and understandable, it is how anybody would react. It establishes an inequality between Jenny and her husband, he has the knowledge and Jenny has had to work to get it. In a similar way to Brian in (Extract 5), Jenny utilises an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), (Extract 8 line 22-23) *"these things to me were so extreme"* to evidence the destructive nature of her husband's refusal to disclose his sexuality, which acts to mitigate her own behaviour in continuing to investigate. She inoculates her stake to innocence describing herself as *"not probably! very naïve"* (Extract 8 line 23-24). Finally in the extract Jenny's talk performs some complex identity work with another extreme case formulation (Extract 8 line 24-25 "*you never think it is going to happen to you*". Here Jenny constructs herself as both an ordinary person who would not expect this to happen, but also someone knowledgeable enough to understand that these things do happen.

5.4.4 Denied knowledge

All the participants' narratives at some point constructed their unknowing as due to their partners' denials when confronted about their sexuality. These descriptions serve to position the participants as innocent by contrasting their

"ordinary" expectable behaviour with an explicit construction of the disclosing partners as deceptive with an implicit moral evaluation.

Extract 9

Prior to (Extract 9) Claire had been talking about how she had met her husband when he was dating her female friend, what he had been like as a younger man, what had attracted her to him, and how she had never suspected that he might be gay.

1	*Claire*	*I liked the fact that he was not worried↑ about*
2		*being a bit different and em (.) but*
3		*sometimes↑when he would laugh and get carried*
4		*away he was a wee bit sort of=how can I describe*
5		*it↑(.) tiny, tiny bit girly↑ an' it must have been*
6		*enough for my friend↑ now she asked him "Are*
7		*you gay?" and he laughed it off↑ He said "No*
8		*don't be silly↑" and >he had gone out with her for*
9		*a couple of weeks (.) and then a few years later*
10		*him and I (.) but we had always stayed friends*
11		*and were always fond of each other< but emm→*
12		
13	*Int*	*It's interesting that when you first↑ knew him*
14		*there was something about him that made you ask*
15		*that question↑*
16		
17	*Claire*	*>Yes↑ °but then like that was 19-(indistinct date)°*
18		*you could they were↑ you were a stereo typical*
19		*gay you were mincing down the street↑ you were*
20		*very effeminate that's what we thought of as gay*
21		*because we didn't know any better that was a gay*
22		*to us↑ < but there was something in his behaviour*

23		*that made us ask that question↑ But then it never*
24		*occurred↑ to me again after that↑ because once he*
25		*had denied it like (.) of course (.) I believe people*
26		*(.) when he said "NO" I think then maybe it was*
27		*starting↑ to become (.) more talked about (..) but*
28		*(.) no it never really never entered my head again*
29		*>I can honestly say the question never came into*
30		*my head again< until the behaviour change↑ (.)*
31		*and the only thing I could put it down to because I*
32		*remember thinking often between 2000 and 2004*
33		*(.) the only thing↑ (.) <"gosh↑ he's having a*
34		*relationship with that man↑ that can't be right↑*
35		*that can't be right↑ I must be wrong (.) I'm really*
36		*bad for thinking that↑">*
37		
38	*Int*	*So you were in battle with yourself↑?*
39		
40	*Claire*	*Yes↑ I felt really bad about myself for thinking*
41		*that↑ and I was right all along↑[suppressed*
42		*laughter]*

In (Extract 9 line 1-2) Claire positions herself as someone who is open-minded, she was attracted to her husband *"being a bit different".* She also positions herself as a rational thinking person in her account, talking about how he could sometimes be a (Extract 9 line 4) *"tiny, tiny bit girly".* This demonstrates to the audience that Claire had had a suspicion about his sexuality. This is mitigated in the repetition of *"tiny",* positioning the clue as not being an obvious one. Claire then employs active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992) and an eye witness account when she talks about her friend directly confronting him with the question about his sexuality. These

rhetorical devices add weight both to Claire's claim of unknowing . His actively voiced denial (Extract 9 line 7) is produced as evidence of his knowing deception. His relationship with Claire's friend is also deployed as evidence of his assumed heterosexuality. Claire also establishes in her account that he was given an opportunity before they were in a sexual relationship to be honest with her (Extract 9 lines 6-7). This establishes a temporal aspect to the deception. Her husband may have known what he was doing from the beginning. If so, this was a protracted knowing on his part, which then positions him as blamed in the account. Further to that, if he was knowing and Claire was unknowing, this acts to construct Claire as being innocent of any breach of unspoken heterosexual norms.

In response to the interviewer's comment about how Claire had sensed something about her husband's sexuality in the early days (Extract 9, lines 13-15), Claire works up a more detailed account of how she couldn't have known. She draws on a stereotype repertoire of gay male behaviour as an evaluative statement (Pomerantz, 1984) to evidence how she might have known about his sexuality, and a common-sense formulation similar to the one employed earlier by Brian about sexuality being visible in behaviour. The clues she would expect to see were missing, (Extract 9 line 19-20) *"mincing down the street", "effeminate".* She also draws on a consensual formulation to bolster her evidence (Extract 6 line 20-21) *"that's what we thought of as gay!"; "That was a gay to us!!"* and a reference to changing social contexts in her use of past tense. Claire's talk, *"because we didn't know any better"* (Extract 9 line 20-21) sandwiched between these two statements could be heard as doing some disclaimer work to avoid a possible homophobic interpretation of her account. In this way her talk could be understood as orienting to maintaining her position as a thinking person who understands that attitudes have changed. This could also be seen as dealing with a potential negative response from the interviewer to Claire's previous beliefs about how gay people are or behave. Her ignorance,

formulated as a consensus *"us"* is multi-functioning, it preserves her innocence in not knowing because she questioned him, she was not alone in thinking and acting as she did, and it highlights his knowing deception. This position is further warranted by an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), (Extract 9 line 27-29). *"no it never really, never entered my head again".* Claire deploys the descriptors *"honestly"* and *"really"* as evidence of the sincerity of her claim. Claire repeats the word *"never"* four times in lines (23-29) underlining her position as a trusting person who takes people at their word and employing *"of course"* as a consensus formulation about how a trusting person acts.

Claire deploys an evaluative statement combined with active voicing and an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) (Extract 9 line 30-33) *"and the only thing I could put it down to because I remember thinking often between 2000 and 2004 the only thing gosh he's having a relationship with that man"* to signify to the listener that she is a thinking person, who does not jump to conclusions but has been left with no other option. Claire positions herself as having to think about her husband's sexuality again because of his *"behaviour change"* (Extract 9 line 30). This attributes blame for her thinking to her husband, he has instigated it. The actively voiced self-castigation *"I'm really bad for thinking that!"* (Extract 9 line 35) is employed to draw the listener's attention to the issue at stake, which is that Claire was right all along. The self-castigation also manages a potential threat to the credibility of her account by any scepticism from the listener and showcasing the work that Claire had put into believing her husband's account. In the denouement statement *"I was right all along",* Claire demonstrates the harm caused to her because her instincts had to be ignored in favour of what her husband was telling her. The suppressed laughter (Extract 9 line 40) could be heard as an ironic device which offers a consensus formulation to the listener. Claire negotiates "doing" being an intuitively knowing person who has been misled, in balance with the position of someone who believes what she is told.

Extract 10

In the following extract from group interview 2, the participants had been talking about how they discovered that their partners had been concealing their sexuality. Corinne's talk sets the scene for her not knowing about her husband's concealed sexuality and his deception. She unexpectedly found gay porn in his luggage and confronted him about the discovery.

Corinne: *when we got back from our honeymoon and I was unpacking the case he'd gone to work he's had my little Burberry holdall thing↑ and in the pocket was gay porn magazines↑ and like "oh my God↑" I mean↑ I'm not as traumatised as you [looks at another participant] because it was just that brief glimpse you know↑ "Oh my God" I'm just a (anonymized location) girl that's straight about everything I was like "Oh my God↑ you need to come home you need to come home now↑" got him home from work and God knows↑ well↑ how he explained it they're so good at explaining everything↑ I just thought >"that's my marriage over↑ I need to go home I need to get all this packed up! and move back↑<" just my <world fell out> and he explained that away↑ "oh that will be (anonymized male name) this guy↑" and I'd never seen him as he wasn't even= as I say at the wedding↑ "that will be (anonymized male name), and it could well have been this guy who put those in there to be discovered↑"

Corrine stakes a claim to the factual status of her account in her organization of the narrative. She creates a contrast between the ordinary event of returning from honeymoon and unpacking (Extract 10 lines 1-3) with the extraordinary event of finding gay porn in her luggage (Extract 10 line 4-5), which externalises the discovery of evidence of her husband's gay sexuality. It situates Corrine as finding the porn, not because of suspicious or anxious looking, but unsuspectingly in the course of routine and conventional behavior. (Wooffitt, 1992) suggests that the deployment of an x/y formulation, "I was just doing x (recollection of an ordinary everyday task) when y (inexplicable and unexpected event comes to first awareness) happened, is used to give credibility to an account when there is no independent corroboration of what happened.

Corrine does then seek corroboration for her account by addressing another participant who had also unexpectedly discovered evidence of her partner's gay lifestyle. Corrine positions herself as reasonable in her assertion that she was not as *"traumatised"* (Extract 10 line 6) as her co-participant had been, but at the same time stakes a claim to the traumatising nature of the discovery. She also invites the listener to hear that there is other evidence of how the traumatising the discovery was: by bringing in the second participant – it happens to other people – and, she would have been even more injured had she seen more (Extract 10 line 7-8) *"it was just that brief glimpse you know"*. In (Extract 10 line 9-10) Corrine does some further identity work in positioning herself as innocent because of her background. She uses the descriptor *"girl"* constructing herself as young and innocent which could be read as underlining the damage of the discovery. Corrine uses active voicing (Extract 10 lines 11-12) to convey the drama of the discovery and to position herself as agentic in trying to address the issue immediately.

In the extract (Extract 10 line 18) Corrine employs extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), *"my world fell out"*), in constructing the devastating impact of the discovery of her husband's concealed sexuality. Thus, his non-heterosexuality is constructed as destructive. This is sandwiched between two claims of his deception: he *"explained"* the discovery away. Her use of *"they*" in (Extract 10 line 13-15) "they're so good at explaining everything" could be heard as inviting the listener to a generalising of disclosing partners' behaviour as regular and persistent, in effect indicating a disposition to being deceptive – utilising what Edwards terms a "script formulation" (Edwards, 1994). Corinne in effect then, constructs an account where her ability to know about her husband's sexuality is compromised by his denial – she is naïve. She structures her description of the discovery of the porn in terms of a first thought formulation (Jefferson, 1984), (Extract 10 lines 15.-17), but then rather than go on to describe any further thoughts, she describes her husband's denial which acts to mitigate her naiveté, by disallowing her to continue with the train of thought which may have led to her knowing about his gay sexuality. This, however, not only acts in mitigation of Corinne's naiveté about her husband's sexuality, but it also performs the subtle work of establishing that naiveté, which is essential to the innocent identity.

The detail about the absence of the blamed friend from the wedding adds to Corinne's claim of unknowing. She could not check the facts, which acts to position her as helpless. Her use of active voicing (Extract 10 lines 19-20) positions her husband as knowing and deliberately deceptive. In common with the other participants Corinne makes use of what Drew (1998, p.297) terms "defensive detailing", which is derived from conversation analysis of frequently extensive detailed descriptions with which speakers construct accounts of something being "trouble" but not attributable to them.

5.5 Attributing blame

In a third overlapping discursive element of innocence construction, the participants construct blame in a variety of ways. This analysis contends that the participants constructed the experience as destructive. However, they struggle to convey in the talk explicitly how or why it was experienced as such. Instead they constructed accounts in which they position themselves as isolated or alone. They describe their partners as having new lives and a new community to join, while they are left in a state of limbo. In their accounts they describe themselves as being positioned as outsiders not only because of the end of their relationships, but because of the nature of the split. They are "cast out" rather than the partner. This is contrary to what they might expect to happen in a relationship where one partner is unfaithful to the other. They draw on heteronormative repertoires to take up or resist these positions. The talk blames the deception by the partners for the pain and devastation, rather than explicitly blaming the partners' sexuality.

5.5.1 Blaming the experience

As Abell and Stokoe (1999) argue, the management of blame as well as innocence in the participants accounts is managed in the attribution of blame to external others or factors, and the maintenance of themselves as not just innocent, but "credibly" innocent people.

Extract 11

In (Extract 11 lines 1-5) Claire has been talking about her reactions to her discovery that her husband was having a relationship with a man.

1	*Claire*	*Pfff→ (explosive exhalation) [makes gestures with*
2		*hands] the only way I can describe it (.) <u>literally</u> I*
3		*feel that what happened to me was my <u>whole</u>*
4		*world just disintegrated↑ it <u>literally</u> just*
5		*disappeared↑ <u>everything</u> that I thought I knew (..)*
6		*←wasn't there↑ >**<u>everything</u>** I thought I had↑ I*
7		*<u>didn't</u> have↑<*

Claire uses an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), the explosive exhalation being the *"only way"* (Extract 11 line 2-3) to describe it, followed by the evaluative statement *"literally"* finishing the sentence with another extreme case formulation *"my whole world disintegrated".* She repeats *"literally"* in (Extract 9 line 4) which adds weight to the formulation of total destruction. The extract finishes with another repeated extreme case formulation (Extract 11 line 5-6) *"everything"* and employs vivid description. Claire's account is produced to present the experience as dramatic, destructive, shocking and something she doesn't have language for. The experience is constructed as having taken everything from her. It is also constructed as something that *"happened"* (Extract 11 line 2) to her. This positions her as helpless, and as a victim of the experience. This manages blame in two ways as Claire constructs her husband's disclosure as a "happening" this avoids explicitly blaming him, but simultaneously it implies a perpetrator.

5.5.2 <u>Being cast out</u>

Other participants constructed themselves as blamed or punished wrongly following a partner's disclosure. This was produced in accounts variably as being

isolated, not having their experience validated by others, and being punished for something they hadn't done.

Extract 12

Prior to this extract (12) Brian has been producing an account of rejection and aloneness following his marital breakup, this fragment begins with an evaluative statement (Extract 12 Line 1-4).

1		
1	*Brian*	*Yes!, because you feel so (..) it's like you are not*
2		*part of society↑ because you're not married↑ and*
3		*like I (.) because I've lost some married friends as*
4		*well↑ because they kinda took sides >or whatever*
5		*they've done↑> (.) and I think people don't know*
6		*what to say to you as well↑ >that's a very strange*
7		*thing but I think that's more on the divorce side of*
8		*things↑ (.) because I should think that happens in*
9		*a lot of divorces where people (.h) they don't*
10		*know what to say to you and they back away and*
11		*because you're not a couple you don't get an*
12		*invite out on a Saturday night↑ and kno=sit in on*
13		*your own and kind of go "Well why don't they*
14		*ring up any more↑"< (.) but now I have to accept*
15		*that that's because of them↑ it's not me it's their*
16		*insecurities or whatever↑ if you wanted me there*
17		*you would pick up the phone (.) if you valued my*
18		*friendship >but again you can't believe that at the*
19		*time<↑ and again it's rejection an' it's a big thing*
20		*rejection↑ definitely for me that was emm you*
21		*were rejected not only by family but by friends*
22		*and by em (.) °their family as well you know°*

23 *>but then she seems to be bestowed with this (.h)*
24 *<u>attention</u>↑ if you like↑ this→ (.) >"how hard it*
25 *must have been for her to walk out of her marital*
26 *home to become her authentic self"< (..) and then*
27 *gay pride comes up and <u>everyone</u> is going ooh*
28 *[gesticulates with hands] (..) I don't want to hear*
29 *about it thanks <u>not</u>↑ because I am against gay*
30 *people↑ but I just don't want this <u>reminder</u> all the*
31 *time*
32

Brian constructs blame by illustrating how he has been punished because of his wife's disclosure. He repeats the pronoun *"you"* three times as an appeal to the listener for a joint formulation of typicality or more universal application. Brian also positions himself as someone who has to do all the work of thinking in this extract. He alternates in the account between a victim position and a rational thinking position. He initially positions himself as a rational person capable of clear thinking, he changes from *"feel so"* (Extract 12 line 1) and uses *"think"* three times (Extract 12 line 5-8). He then moves to the main claim which is that he is isolated because people who he might have expected support from because they know him and the situation, have either taken sides, or don't know what to say about his experience. However, there is a globalising quality to the statement in that the use of *"they"* seems deliberately ambiguous or vague, and by which device Brian is not limiting the extent of the blame. He also stakes a claim to ignorance of their motivations (Extract 12 line 4-5) *"because they kinda took sides or whatever they've done".* This under-specification in the use of the word *whatever* could be understood as providing a gloss on many types of reactions implicitly sharing the characteristic of being unsupportive without needing further specification, it does not have its own name, it is *"whatever".* He utilises an

actively voiced norm breach (Edwards, 1997) to establish his confusion about his abandonment by people (Extract 12 line 8) *"that's a very strange thing".* This constructs the rejection as abnormal, and as something that there is no way to explain. This internal reference also serves to externalise the phenomenon - separating it from himself.

Brian again positions himself as rational and thinking in opposition to this when on the one hand he presents the rejection by other people as "normal" or to be expected; (Extract 12 lines 9-10) *"they don't know what to say to you and they back away*", displaying these practices as being generally occurring behaviour in the context of how single people are treated (Edwards, 1994; Pomerantz, 1986). This portrays a particular version of blaming the behaviour of other people – in this case the very people whom might reasonably be expected to offer support - which justifies his isolation and loneliness (Potter, 1996). Brian describes sitting at home on a Saturday night waiting for someone to call him. He utilises active voicing and a rhetorical question to engage the interviewer in thinking with him and to emphasis his helplessness. He is waiting for others to include him, and the absence of this constructs his exclusion (Extract 12 lines 10-13).

From (lines 9-22) in the extract Brian categorises himself as being punished in two ways by his wife's disclosure. Initially, he is cast out, a pariah, because he is no longer part of a couple, the detail of listing people who abandoned him adds credibility to the claim. Later in the extract (lines 22-26) he makes a claim that the wrong-doer is not punished, but instead has a new and celebrated identity to assume. This draws on an implicit heteronormative repertoire of fidelity and monogamy in relationship. His wife is rewarded for her breach rather than punished, and therefore Brian's position as a victim is troubled. The extract ends with Brian deploying a disclaimer to mitigate his claim about his victim position being troubled by his wife's

lesbian identity. The logic of the disclaimer is to construct Brian as not being the sort of person who one would be taking this particular line of argument. He is not blaming her gay identity, he is placing the blame in a wider societal context. He is being punished, but he is not to blame for what has happened. Someone who can be glossed as a homophobe could potentially be dismissed by the listener and to construct himself as not being *"against gay people"* (Extract 12 lines 28-29) potentially wards off such a dismissal (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006).

Extract 13

In a similar construction of being positioned as the outsider or outcast David had been talking about his grief following his wife's disclosure of her relationship with a woman, and how he had felt about how her work colleagues had reacted to the disclosure. David had previously described feeling as if no one understood his feelings of distress about his wife's disclosure and the interview had summarised and reflected his statements back to him.

1	*David*	*The first thing was that I noticed one day that she*
2		*got a little place mat thing↑ obviously bought for*
3		*her, by (anonymised work colleague) and on it (.)*
4		*it had a picture of the YMCA thing and it said*
5		*"You may not be" (.) I can't remember exactly*
6		*what it said but something like↑ "You may not be*
7		*this gay but at least you are trying!" >outwardly*
8		*I laughed, but inwardly I felt like I had been*
9		*stabbed in the heart because of that< (.) because*
10		*it felt like↑ >exactly as you described it< that (.)*
11		*that↑ group of people, who knew me pretty well*
12		*had pretty much brushed aside my grief and just*
13		*in that one little thing had accepted her (..)*

14 *adulation is too strong a word, but support*
15 *recognition blah blah blah↑ I actually posted*
16 *that↑ took a picture of that, as I was on my own,*
17 *and posted it on the group, and you know there*
18 *was fairly universal condemnation*

David's statement *"The first thing was that I noticed"* (Extract 13 line 1) is framed in a way which is suggestive of a number of subsequent noticings on his part. The vivid detail in his actively voiced description of the placemat (Wooffitt, 1992) acts to construct the factuality and the impact of the event, while his admission that he *"can't remember exactly what it said"* (Extract 13 line 5-6) could be seen as adding to the veracity of his account, as it positions him as the teller of features of the experience that he can't recall. David's complaint is located within a narrative structure which according to Edwards and Potter (1992) can work to increase the plausibility of a claim. In this specific context a claim to recall every single detail might be heard as less plausible than David's acknowledgement that he cannot remember everything which could be heard as more convincing.

David constructs his reaction as split between his visible response and his unseen response, privileging his construction of the event as an attack on himself. The use of the wounding metaphor *"stabbed in the heart"* (Extract 13 lines 8-9) dramatically constructs the event as perpetrating an act of violence on him (Buttny, 1993). This device acts as an introduction to the upshot of the extract (line 10-13) where David describes in a three-part list (Jefferson, 1990) having his grief overlooked by his wife's colleagues. David introduces the list with an invitation to the interviewer to join him in a consensual formulation of what is to come, orienting to the interviewer's comment prior to the extract that it sounded as if he had felt hurt by peoples' lack of understanding of his distress (Extract 13 line 10) *"because it felt like!,*

exactly as you described it that": here the interviewer is constructed by David as a credible expert witness to his account. The first part of the list constructs David's position with the group *"who knew me pretty well",* categorising the group as people who could have reasonably been expected to show some sensitivity to his experience (Hall & Gough, 2011), and in similar construction to Brian in the previous extract blaming not the disclosing partner, but a wider group, for his isolation. He uses the metaphor "*brushed aside",* drawing on a common-sense formulation of this as actively dismissing, or discarding his grief. The third part consists of this group's acceptance of his wife's sexuality "*and just in that one little thing had accepted her*". The denial of *"adulation"* conversely works to foreground the word (Extract 13 line 13) by locating David's subsequent reasonable evaluations of *"recognition"* and *"support"* in the framework of adulation. This way David puts in a strong claim without looking as if he is overdoing it. He is taking care of himself, by avoiding a gloss of being over-reactive or exaggerating his pain. David constructs the support group as being somewhere that his pain and upset would be accepted and understood. This acts in two ways, firstly it performs the action of creating a consensual *"condemnation"* (Extract 12 line 17) of his wife's colleagues lack of empathy with him, and secondly it adds facticity to David's account of isolation. The group is constructed as the only place he can be sure of being understood, which acts to blame everyone else not in the group for a lack of understanding, locating blame for his grief in a wider societal context while avoiding direct blaming of his wife's sexuality.

5.5.3 Being wrongly punished

Extract 14

In this extract the participants (Group interview 1) construct a consensual formulation of having been the loser in the experience because it is their lives that have changed and not their spouses'.

1	*Belinda:*	*I think it <u>all</u> comes down to the things that*
2		*we found↑ I <u>mean</u> you had to just <u>sit</u> there*
3		*and watch like a tennis ma<u>tch</u>↑*
4		
5	*Annabel*	*<u>He's</u> got his <u>kids</u> around <u>him</u> he's still got*
6		*the <u>dog</u>↑ his <u>(work</u>↑)*
7		
8	*Catherine*	*<u>His</u> life's not changed really↑*
9		
10	*Belinda*	*<u>He</u> <u>hasn't</u> had to change anything↑ other*
11		*than have (male partner) in his life↑ and*
12		*<u>not</u> the person he was with for twenty five*
13		*<u>years</u>↑(.) AND duped <u>and lied</u> to for twenty*
14		*five years↑*

Belinda constructs her experience of her partner's disclosure as being like that of a spectator at a sporting event (Extract 14 line 2-3) "*watch like a tennis match*", positioning herself as an observer rather than an active participant. Her use of *"think"* at (Extract 14 line 1) positions her version of events as reflecting her person view. Annabel corroborates Belinda's claim utilising a three-part list (Extract 14 line 5-6). Jefferson (1990) suggests that the use of a three-part list allows the speaker to indicate that the three discrete parts belong to a common denominator - in this case a family. The ordinary domesticity that is evoked in the deployment of *"dog*", highlights for the listener the extent of Belinda's loss. The pet could be argued to be symbolic of the family home, and Belinda's husband has possession of this symbol. Catherine provides further bolstering of the Belinda's formulation in her claim (Extract 14 line 8) "*His life's not changed really*". The implication here being that Belinda's life has changed because of his actions, and that she has lost out. This claim is made

more powerful because it is not made by Belinda, but by an eye-witness which lends credibility to the account. This concludes with Belinda further corroborating Catherine's statement from (line 8) with an extreme case formulation (Extract 14 line 10) "*He hasn't had to change anything!".*

Belinda's explicit reference to the period of time (Extract 14 line 12-13) *"twenty five years"* highlights an ongoing deception which has greater veracity given her specification of the exact number of years in which it took place. She then makes an explicit accusation regarding this deception. She was *"duped",* treated as if she was stupid (Extract 14 line 13), while similarly to Brian's account the transgressor is rewarded for their behavior. The repetition of *"twenty-five years"* at (Extract 14 line 13) is deployed to highlight the temporal element of his deception. Similarly, Potter (1996) suggests time can be used rhetorically as a critique, which in turn makes relevant the personal costs to Belinda of his behavior (Edwards, 1998). Belinda has made an investment of time in this marriage and she has lost out on that investment. Her husband is positioned as blamed for that and implicitly therefore her innocence is warranted. This is resonant with Lawes (1999) notion of marriage being discursively constructed as an investment. In the case of Belinda's claim, her husband is positioned as wrongly reaping the rewards of her investment.

5.5.4 Victim blaming

Extract 15

Claire's account produces a variation on blame in which she positions herself as being blamed by unnamed others for her husband's sexuality.

1	*Claire:*	*I think that's partly why you don't want to*
2		*tell people↑ it's that emm(.) "Oh you're*

3 *stupid↑" or "you've turned your husband*
4 *gay↑" or (..) and that's the thing↑ I did feel*
5 *so isolated↑ I literally felt I was the only*
6 *person in*
7 *(anonymized region) that this has happened*
8 *to↑ because there was no one >and there*
9 *still isn't↑< ten years on↑*

The vagueness of the term "people" (Extract 15 line 2) invites the listener to a formulation of Claire as being judged by everyone. This positions her as being very alone in her experience. She manages the dilemma of having kept the secret with him in two ways. She employs active voicing to undermine any claim that she may have imagined other peoples' reactions (Wooffitt, 1992). This mitigates her decision not to tell people by providing an environment for the listener within which Claire can construct a version of herself who is blamed wrongly. Claire also utilises extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), (Extract 15 line 4-5) *"so isolated", "only person"* to blame the lack of available community support for her feelings of isolation. Claire formulates the experience as something that has *"happened"* to her (Extract 15 line 6), positioning her as a victim of events. She deploys a temporal element *"ten years on!"* (Extract 15 line 8) to produce a complaint that community attitudes have not changed, and she is still isolated by - what Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 212) suggest is - a "place identity". The boundaries of Claire's regional location are implicitly offered to the listener via an attributional formulation of "how things are here", and position the community as blamed in an implicit complaint, one which Drew (1998) might describe as being designed to represent the moral character of the behaviour of the community.

5.5.5 Having to stay in the closet

Participants also constructed accounts of being isolated because of not being able to tell people about their situation in order to protect the privacy of their disclosing partner, in effect blaming the secrecy surrounding their partners' sexuality for this isolation.

Extract 16

Immediately prior to this extract from an individual interview Clive has been talking about what he considered to be some of the most difficult parts of the experience, and is responding now to a direct question regarding where he sought support with his experience.

Clive *I think that it was↓ (.) at the time when I wasn't able to talk to anybody else because she wasn't out and if I was to talk to anybody that I knew it would mean outing her or risk outing her (..) then the support group becomes useful in that respect because you have got the anonymity↑ and >you can spill the beans and get it off your chest↑<*

There is a distinctive form of blaming and identity management being done in this fragment, which is reminiscent of the identity work described in Beattie and Doherty (1995). Clive can't manage the consequences of the disclosure for himself or look after himself because he has to protect his wife's sexuality. There is also an implicit construction of himself as being considerate, while at the same time alerting the listener to the fact that it was his wife has put him in this position. The blame is subtle and is constructed in the contrast between the isolation Clive has to endure to

protect his wife, versus her "out but not out" situation over which he has no control. Clive constructs himself as constrained, he cannot "*risk outing her"* (Extract 16, line 2-4). So even if his wife was out she is somehow vulnerable because of her sexuality and needs to be protected from something wider which is unnamed but implicit in his account. In (Extract 16, line 4-6) Clive constructs the support group as helpful, and names the *"anonymity"* as a factor of this which adds weight to the notion of danger around the issue.

In his deployment of two conventional sayings in the form of metaphor *"spill the beans", "get it off your chest"* (Extract 16, line 6-7*)* a claim to the reasonableness of his prior statement is being made. The commonplace aspect, and the vagueness inoculates his claim from questioning, making it harder for the listener to dispute. However, as Clive then went on to describe how he doesn't need or use the support group as much as he previously did before changing the focus of his narrative, the use of idiom could also be understood here to be a closing down of the topic (Drew & Holt, 1998).

5.5.6 Blaming no one

Extract 17

Laura has been giving an account in her interview about how difficult she had found it to talk to anyone about her husband's disclosure, and the effects of the experience on her own mental health. At the time of the interview she had managed to begin to tell people that she was separated but found telling the nature of the separation still very hard to talk about.

1

1 *Laura:* *>it sounds as if I am quite far away from <u>actually</u>*
2 *telling <u>any</u>one the circumstances↑< but (.h) I*
3 *don't <u>know</u>↑(.) °I don't know, I don't know°(hh)*
4 *(..) I mean↑my closest friend was very <u>very</u> <u>very</u>*
5 *difficult about this to start with she says=she just*
6 *says I'm homophobic for thinking this is in*
7 *anyway different from (.) having any other*
8 *circumstances of splitting up >which I <u>absolutely</u>*
9 *[laughter in voice] disagree with that↑< I do not*
10 *think I am homophobic in <u>any</u> way*
11
12

In this extract Laura manages a tension between disclosing the reasons for her separation and potential negative reaction to that disclosure which might blame her. The extract begins with an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), (Extract 17 line 2) *"telling anyone".* She then uses repetition on two occasions firstly at (line 2-3) *"I don't know"* repeated three times to formulate for the listener her difficulty in comprehending the situation, and hedging the issue by softening the discourse and marking it as sensitive (Wiggins, 2017). Laura then repeats *"very"* (line 4) three times, deployed in mitigation for the reported speech admission that her closest friend has accused her of homophobia (Extract 17 line 5-6). This appears to be offered in support of Laura's difficulty in telling people the circumstances of her split. It categorises Laura and her friend in what Stokoe (2012) terms a duplicative organisation, that have obligations to each other and can reasonably be expected to operate as a unit or team-like manner.

Drawing on an implicit repertoire associated with the membership category 'friend', this signifies to the listener that even someone as close as a best friend does

not understand Laura's experience, and a reasonable person could be expected to see the hurt of that. The listener is also invited to a consensual formulation of the dangers of sharing the information more widely, if even a best friend cannot be relied on to understand. Edwards (1994, 2006) suggests that the use of the historic present tense works to provide predictable types of event sequences, conveying a sense of logic in speakers' accounts. These rhetorical devices are utilised by speakers to formulate events as regular, rendering them factually robust and *knowable*. The scripting device statements employed by Laura "*closest friend was very very very difficult"* (lines 4-5) *and "she says"* (line 5), *"she just says"* (line 6) use the historic present tense, generalising Laura's friend's behaviour as regular and persistent, in effect perhaps indicating a disposition to this non-supportive stance. As Potter (1996) suggests, to acknowledge a stake may act to inoculate against it, which Laura does by her admission that her friend has accused her of homophobia. Laura then further circumvents any possible gloss of herself as homophobic, by the use of a disclaimer with extreme case formulation (Extract 17 line 8-9) *"I absolutely disagree with that*" (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006); Pomerantz, 1986). The laughter in Laura's voice at this point can be heard as an invitation to the interviewer to a consensus with Laura by providing a response cue (Edwards, 2005).

Extract 18

Later in her interview Laura manages a dilemma of stake around the responsibility for the experience between not blaming herself, her husband. Laura explicitly constructs deception as the blameworthy element of the experience, echoing the constructions of other participants.

1

1 *Laura:* *You know, many people might judge↑ >and*

2 *there's certainly nothing I've got to be ashamed*

of↑ and I don't think my husband's got anything to be ashamed of< it just is as it is (.) and I don't think (..) >I think he's done something wrong by lying to me when he did at Christmas and having someone round to the house for sex at new year< these are bad things (.) I think he's been very selfish about it but at the end of the day it's not (.) you know it's not his fault in terms of his sexual orientation↑ I do believe that he (..)(hh) I think if somebody marries someone knowing that they are gay↑ I think that that's a horrendous thing to do to someone↓ I think it's an awful thing to do to someone↓ it's an incredibly selfish incredibly cruel thing to do to someone↓ because you're talking about the most <fundamental relationship and step in a new life> well that's certainly how I see marriage and a partner (.) you're talking about somebody who is the core of your life and to be keeping that from them I think that's an absolutely↑ unforgivable betrayal but I don't think that's what happened with my husband↑

In the opening statement of the extract (Extract 18 line 1), Laura's descriptive statement *"You know, many people might judge"* is offered to warrant her stake to reasonableness, by noting her difference to other people who might not be expected to be as reasonable. This statement also establishes the experience as something that is worthy of judgement following which Laura then proffers an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) to establish her own innocence (Extract 18 line 1-2)

"there's certainly nothing I've got to be ashamed of" which she balances with a conditional claim to her husband's innocence. She doesn't *"think"* he has a reason to be ashamed. The claim to innocence by Laura implies the possibility of blame by unnamed others. At (Extract 18 line 4) Laura utilises a vague description *"it just is as it is"* which positions both Laura and her husband as non-agentic. The experience is outside of their control so they are both blameless (Stokoe & Edwards, 2008; Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003).

Laura utilises the word *"think"* thirteen times within this extract and past tense *'thought'* on two occasions. This acts on two levels: firstly Laura deploys it to stake a claim to her reasonableness and thoughtfulness, and evidences her 'not-blaming' conditional construction of the experience, the use of the word think creates an element of uncertainty. Secondly, and conversely though, this uncertainty acts to allow for the possibility of an alternative version where her husband could be blamed. In effect, Laura is, as suggested by Wiggins (2017) hedging her talk to mark it as conditional or provisional. Laura then explicates the conditions of her construction (Extract 18 line 5-8). She explicitly outlines the actions that are blameworthy *"bad things";* lying and having someone at their house for sex (Drew, 1998). Laura invites the listener to a consensual common sense formulation of these behaviours as wrong, constructing intimate relationships as requiring sexual faithfulness and truthfulness. Laura then explicitly separates her husband's sexuality from blame *"it's not his fault"* (line 9-10). Here Laura constructs herself as not blaming his sexuality, inoculating her account from a potential homophobic gloss, and also placing it outside of her husband's control.

At (line 10-12) Laura moves from an individual account to a more general or global account *"I do believe that he (.) I think if somebody marries someone knowing they are gay".* This footing shift (Goffman, 1981) invites the listener to a consensual

formulation of knowing deception as the blameworthy aspect of the experience, and works to establish Laura as an ordinary person, in that, if this happened to anyone it would be unacceptable. From (Extract 18 line 12-16) Laura describes this imagined deception employing vivid description, twice repeated extreme case formulation *"incredibly"* (Pomerantz, 1986), and a three part list (Jefferson, 1990) *"horrendous thing", "awful thing" "incredibly selfish, incredibly cruel thing",* to ward off any potential gloss on her as someone who does not take monogamous relationship seriously. Laura here seems to avoid a heteronormative assumption around relationships while still drawing on what are described for the purposes of analysis as implicit intimate relationship *'rules'*.

The blame constructed in this sentence (Extract 18 line 12-16) also sets up Laura's claim (line 16-19) to a *"fundamental", "core"* nature of intimate relationships, and the unacceptable attack on those relationships, and by association on the self of the other partner perpetrated by knowing deceit. Laura explicitly separates marriage from other forms of relationship (Extract 18 line 18-19), and by claiming ownership of that opinion she allows for an alternative view to exist, thereby softening or inoculating her stake. The upshot (Wetherell & Potter, 1988) of Laura's discursive work in the extract is that deception is constructed with an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) as *"absolutely unforgiveable betrayal"* (Extract 18 lines 21-22), but Laura is also constructing her experience as an exception to that rule.

In the detailed outlining of potential culpability with the post-hoc caveat, there is a *'not blaming – blaming'* in operation in Laura's account which is more subtle and arguably more powerful than in more generic disclaimers (Augustinos & Every, 2007). There is also - in terms of Laura's membership of the support group - the possibility that the castigation is deployed for the benefit of the audience, to affiliate with other members' experiences with deception which could account for the stance developed

in this account. The mitigation might be to separate her husband from that criticism – this could account for perhaps some seeming acceptance, passivity or lack of anger on her part.

5.6 Heteronormative expectations

The discursive thread deployed by the participants which links the three discrete fields is one of a taken for granted heterosexuality. Thus far the analysis has touched on both the interactional and ideological concerns of the participants' accounts, acknowledging both, and also highlighting that the latter may provide a context for the former. In this next section the focus is on the interplay between the two in the extracts analysed.

5.6.1 'Rules' of heterosexual relationships

Extract (1) demonstrates how effortlessly the heteronormative order considered in Chapter 2, and what for the purposes of this study will be termed possible codes about intimate relationships which emerged in the analysis, are reproduced in talk. The notion of codes of conduct or rules within which intimate relationships are negotiated, is posited, for example, by Argyle and Henderson (1985) and Clark and Chrisman (1994). As seen in Coates (2013), The interviewer, in her initial statement to Belinda (Extract 1, line1) "*you were the rock",* aligns herself with a discourse of relationship norms, that is, that a partner will be reliable and supportive. This relationship norm is then unproblematically heard by Annabel, Belinda,

Catherine and the interviewer as a heterosexual relationship. They also, through their references to their husbands, construct themselves in a "taken for granted way" as normatively heterosexual women (Coates, 2013; Kitzinger, 2005). This also functions to work up the straight partners' unknowing position.

This taken for granted acceptance of heterosexuality, and the possible codes around that, are also visible in Belinda's talk (Extract 2 lines 3-5) "*he told me that he loved me! and he told me by September that he knew he was going to spend the rest of his life with me!!".* These codes are made relevant again in Brian's account, where there is a consensual and unchallenged understanding between Brian and the interviewer of *"the white dress and all the rest of it"* (line 10 of Extract 5) as descriptive of the normal expectations of marriage (Ingraham, 2005). The codes are also made relevant is in Claire's account (Extract 4) in a more nuanced way where she positions both herself and her husband as being subject to unvoiced rules of heterosexuality. It is also present in the group talk of (Extract 14) where Catherine, Belinda and Annabel talk about family life in a manner that can be heard as assumptive of a heterosexual family. This extends Kitzinger's (2005) argument that although speakers do not usually announce their sexual orientation, their heterosexuality is continually made apparent in their talk.

In (Extract 5 and 6) once again, these codes are again deployed, as Brian constructs an unproblematic account of 'taken for granted' monogamous heterosexuality, effectively "othering" alternative options for relationship. Brian further places his wife's behaviour outside of an "implicit" code of heterosexual relationship; ie: that there should be transparency about sexuality. These implicit codes are utilised again in (Extract 7) when Corinne talks about "normal guys", and Claire's account (Extract 9). These codes were deployed by Corinne and Claire and accepted unchallenged by the interviewer as "heterosexual" guys. In (Extract 8 line 8) Jenny

and the interviewer share laughter about Jenny's ironic use of *"coffee is not a drink"* as an implicit description of her husband's deviation from the norm of heterosexuality. Laura (Extract 18) does a lot of discursive work to highlight the importance of the codes of marriage, which is deployed and accepted unproblematically by the interviewer as a heterosexual marriage. Also no participant, with the exception of Laura, made an explicit reference to their own sexuality, which may also be illustrative of an unspoken but assumed heterosexual norm (Kitzinger, 2005).

5.6.2 Breaking the 'rules'

The codes of heterosexual relationship that are produced in the accounts are also made relevant as having been broken by the disclosing partner. The straight partners construct themselves as having not broken these codes but having still been punished, while their partners go unpunished and in some ways rewarded for their actions. There is an inextricable intertwining and overlap with the blame and accountability element. Brian (Extract 12 line 16-22) "*and it's a big thing rejection, definitely for me it was. You were rejected not only by family, but by friends and by their family as well you know!, but then she seems to be bestowed with this (..) attention if you like?, this (.) "how hard it must have been for her to walk out of her marital home to become this authentic self", (..) and then gay pride comes up and everyone is going (..) I don't want to hear about it thanks!!"*, and David in (Extract 13 line 9-12) *"that group of people, who knew me pretty well!, had pretty much brushed aside my grief, and just in that one little thing had accepted her (..) Adulation is too strong a word, but support!!, recognition!, blah, blah, blah".* His partner's sexuality is constructed as being more important than his distress. There are no prizes for being the ones following the rules, there is instead a confusion about a perceived punishment.

Breaking the 'code' is also constructed as dangerous for both partners by Clive (Extract 16 line 1-4) "*I wasn't able to talk to anybody else because she wasn't out and if I was to talk to anybody that I knew, it would mean outing her or risk outing her".* This risk remains unexplicated in David's account, but is more developed in Claire's (Extract 15 line 1-3) "*I think that's partly why you don't want to tell people!, it's that (.) "Oh you're stupid!!", or "you've turned your husband gay!".* This can be heard as a potential punishment to Claire by unnamed others for the breaking of some implicit code of conduct for heterosexual relationship. The straight partners are in danger of being held responsible for enabling or even causing their partners to 'become' gay. Non-conformity to heterosexuality is constructed as being destructive to marriage in (Extract 10 line 4, 11), when Corinne describes herself *"traumatised",* and her *"marriage over"* following the discovery of gay porn in her luggage.

5.6.3 Avoiding homophobic accusations

Most of the participants at some point in their interviews made reference to not being homophobic. This is reflected in (Extract 12 line 22-23) as Brian issues an explicit denial in his account. Laura also directly addresses a possible homophobic slant in her account (Extract 17), in her description of her friend's accusation of homophobia and her explicit denial. She further avoids a homophobic gloss on her account (Extract 18) by separating her husband's actions from his sexuality and placing that outside of his control. Arguably, the absence of explicit blame of their partner's non-heterosexuality could be heard as an avoidance of a homophobic gloss on the accounts. These rhetorical devices used by the participants allow them to make complaints about their partners which are potentially problematic, namely, they are heterosexuals complaining about LGB identifying people. Their complaints then are delicately formulated in ways which inoculate the speakers against being heard as homophobic, or un-liberal.

5.7 Summary of Findings

This chapter has presented a discursive field '*establishing innocence'* which was composed of three intertwined elements; the construction of a *'victim identity',* managing the dilemma of knowing or not knowing about the partners' sexuality, a *'question of knowledge'*, and the management of accountability, *'the attribution of blame'.* The analysis illustrates the range of participants' discursive work as they navigated between these elements interchangeably, and much rhetorical work was evident in their talk as they sought to negotiate the complexities of accomplishing a nuanced innocence. This discursive work is understood here as the participants establishing their own victimhood whilst not denying the dilemma facing their partners. It is also concerned with establishing the participants' unknowing – as if to have known threatens both their victim status and their claims of accountability. It is also concerned with the management of blame or accountability. The local discursive work was threaded with a largely implicit heteronormative ideological discourse, from which emerges implicitly constructed *'rules'* or 'codes of *behaviour'* which could be seen to influence the interaction between the participants, and between the interviewer and the participants.

5.8 Reflective Box

> Analysis of discourse is like riding a bicycle compared to conducting experiments or analysing survey data which resemble baking cakes from a recipe". (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.168).

The analysis section was the most difficult to write. It was extremely time consuming, and I wrestled with the data for months. I was all at once, too close to it, too removed from it, avoiding it and enmeshed in it. I was overwhelmed by the responsibility I felt to my participants to properly honour their experiences. These people had shared their stories, their pain and their vulnerabilities with me, and I felt weighed down by a need to "do it properly". I was anxious about what to leave out, what to include, and how I would make sure that everyone's voice was heard in the analysis. In the end I had to accept that, firstly, it was impossible in the scope of this thesis to cover everything emerging in the data, and secondly that I needed to choose extracts that reflected best a general sense of the theme that emerged and was selected. Due to this, and because some of the accounts contained a lot of personal information which made confidentiality difficult to maintain, some group participants are not directly represented in the extracts, and some individual accounts are more represented than others. I hope though to have captured the spirit of all the accounts.

I also experienced anxiety about the sensitivity of the topic, which I believe reflects the dilemma of my participants. I was nervous about any possibly homophobic slant emerging from the analysis, because this was not how I believed I my participants constructed their experiences, and nor was it how I was approaching the data. However, I think that this illustrates the heteronormative theme which emerged in the analysis, in the sense that both my participants and myself are nervous about straying from a liberal discourse around sexuality but were equally oblivious to the 'taken for granted' heterosexual nature of our talk around relationship. I procrastinated by reading about different methods of discourse analysis and arguing with myself over which approach might work best. Gill (2000) suggests fifty seven varieties of discourse analysis, and in attempting to consider many of these, I lost faith in my ability to choose any valid method and as a result the rate of work was sometimes

snail's pace. However, as I became more familiar with the data and a vivid discursive theme began to emerge, this ceased to feel problematic and became more exciting.

It was however, less difficult than I imagined to stay with the action orientation of the talk and not to be drawn towards my participants' inner worlds with presumed unconscious motivations, attitudes, or emotions.

Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Introduction to discussion

The aim of this research study was to explore straight partners' constructions of life following a partner's disclosure as LGB. As such, a discursive psychology framework with a critical element was utilized to interrogate the participants' accounts at both a macro and micro level, the effectiveness of which will be evaluated later in this chapter. Firstly, this chapter will discuss the analysis described in the previous chapter, expanding on the three identified intertwined discursive strands that comprised the wider discursive field of "*establishing innocence'*: '*constructing a victim identity'; 'a question of knowing'* and *'attributing blame'*. The discussion will then address the '*heteronormative' thread'* which is woven through all the participants' accounts, before moving on to a critical reflection on the methodology and method adopted in this thesis. Leading from this, the limitations of this study will be considered, and the chapter will then move on to explore potential implications of the research findings for Counselling Psychology in terms of both clinical practice and research literature. This is followed by a brief consideration of possible future research opportunities on the topic. .The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and a final reflexive account of the research.

6.2 Discussing establishing Innocence

This analysis of the data focused on the participants' discursive construction of their identities as innocent at a local level of talk, as well as available discourses that appear to influence these constructions. Data was collected in the form of six semi-structured individual interviews (three female and three male) and two group interviews (all female) which were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The findings of the present research both confirm previous literature in several respects and offer a novel perspective on the phenomenon. As proposed in Chapter One of this thesis, the analysis has illuminated how the partners or spouses of people who disclose as LGB report on existing and constructed discourses regarding the disclosure and its consequences with regard to their own position or identity of *innocence*. The findings suggest that this is complex and nuanced discursive work, coupled with extended insight into the wider discourses on sexuality and intimate relationships – in particular – heteronormative discourses which influence these participants' constructions. For these reasons, the author contends that this study offers both novel and empirical findings to the current paucity of research literature on the topic.

For instance, this study extends Buxton's (2006) suggestion that crises of identity, powerlessness and personal integrity arise for straight partners, and examines this through the lens of one discursive theme. However, unlike most previous research on this topic it interrogates these notions at the level of the participants' talk so in this sense fulfils the aim of the study by addressing this gap in the literature. The study contends that one aspect of the complex discursive work that is carried out by the participants, is to construct a nuanced identity of innocence in the face of their partners' disclosure as LGB, which is not visible in previous research, where empirical research has been restricted to specific cultural or religious groups experience.

This analysis is germane to the complex identity work carried out by speakers in McKinlay and Dunnett (1998) – discussed further later in this chapter - which illustrates how people can present two apparently inconsistent versions of themselves. The participants in the current study similarly navigate the available discursive fields, staking a claim to this innocent identity, by negotiating other

identities. To describe this identity claim, a discursive field named here as *'establishing innocence'* was produced in the accounts from three discrete but overlapping elements, which for the purposes of explanation are talked about in terms of: *constructing a victim identity, a question of knowledge*, and *attributing blame*. Each of these elements will be further examined in more detail in the following sections. This construction of innocence in the analysis also appears to draw on a major cultural resource, which is the taken for granted nature of heterosexual intimate relationships and the possible implicit rules or codes that influence these relationships.

The author notes that what is missing from all the participants' accounts is any indication that the relationships would have failed for a reason other than the partners' concealed sexual identity. This has a potential be heard in several ways: it may be indicative perhaps of the importance placed on the codes or rules of engagement in heterosexual relationships as discussed in the previous chapter. There is also a possibility, unanalysed in this study, that the partners' LGB sexuality becomes a focus for relationship breakdown to the exclusion of any other factors, including personal responsibility. However, it could also be heard as the participants orientating to the researcher's focus on the impact of the disclosing partners' sexuality rather than other issues in the relationships. The author is also alert to the danger of extrapolating this data to the world at large as suggested as a potential pitfall of discourse analysis by Antaki, Billig, Edwards and Potter (2003). These findings relate to these participants and this researcher in the context of this analysis only.

6.2.1 Constructing a victim identity

The analysis has identified contradictions in this discursive element: on one hand, a victim identity is desired and required and, on the other, it is avoided perhaps because it is at odds with an identity as an agentic person. This is initially apparent

in the participants' constructions of their different victim identities. These participants' victim identities were not produced as readily available, nor unproblematic, potentially reflecting the lack of explicit claim to this identity in the reviewed literature (Adler & Ben Ari, 2018; Buxton, 2004; Buxton, 2006; Buxton, 2006b). This analysis illustrates how a delicate balance is constructed between their worked-up qualities as strong individuals – resisting a victim identity - and their identities as unwitting, helpless victims of their partners' behaviour. In constructing themselves as having been especially selected or chosen the female participants discursively protect their positions as non-initiators of the victimising experience (Hopper, 2001), which according to Holstein and Miller (1997) is essential to a claim of ideal victim identity. In the current study neither a victim identity nor an agentic identity appears to be produced as a given in the participants' accounts: unlike the normative and implicit discourses around heterosexual relationship behaviours that are produced as common-sense. Instead, multiple parallel discourses are visible in action, utilised as resources by the participants to make sense of their experience, which is resonant with the narrative links in identity work which Gubrium and Holstein (2009) suggest are deployed in accounts to manage identity tensions.

The female participants negotiate identity tensions between being agentic, "strong", capable people, with simultaneous implicit claims to their position as innocent victims, similar to the discursive work done by participants in Leisenring's (2006) study on victim identity. In their individual ways the current study's female participants' accounts perform a three-pronged cultural tension in the production of identities: innocent victims of the disclosing partners versus identities as strong and independent, rational thinkers, versus a nurturing, caretaking identity as a partner. This is resonant with Riessman's (2000) study of the stigma-resisting practices in the narratives of childless women in India, and a later study on the ways men with a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis manage troubled identities of invalid and masculinity

(Riessman, 2003). Although these studies are very diverse examples of discursive identity work, they all highlight how the participants downplay a dis-preferred identity, by highlighting a preferred one. The findings of the current study introduce a novel reading of the data illustrating negotiation and subtle balancing as the participants manage the potentially troubled and complex identity of being innocent in the face of their partners' non-heterosexual sexuality.

The male participants in the current study constructed the victim position in a different way to the female participants, in that the problem was located outside of the couple as "something" that occurred or changed. In this sense these male participants negotiated a *"*dual victim" experience more directly than the females, while less directly making complaints about the disclosing partners' transgressions. This may indicate some desire on the part of the male participants to "modify" a victim identity – avoiding constructing themselves as vulnerable in the relationship - as seen in the discursive work of male victims of violence in Burcar and Åkerström (2009). Whilst there was no specific interest in looking for any manifestation of gender differences – and indeed the sample of participants was not selected with that possibility in mind – the analysis revealed at least a tentative case for considering how the talk of the male and female participants differed in respect of their constructions of a victim identity. Similarly to the female participants, the male participants positioned themselves as non-initiators of the problem, and they also performed a balancing of identities as good or worthy people with a victim identity. This is seen in Akerstrom, Burcar and Wasterfors's (2011) study of how young Swedish men perform masculinity in victim narratives by constructing a complex balancing of these identities in their accounts.

In addition to illustrating a tension between constructing an identity as both victim and knowing, the analysis presented here arguably demonstrates an attempt

by the participants to discursively construct and balance a complex and contradictory victim identity, as illustrated in Ackerstrom, et al. (2011). However, in the face of an implicit and relatively new cultural discourse in the accounts around acceptance of sexual identities this is produced as a "precarious" identity. If these participants stake a strong claim to the victim position, that may then deny a position of victim to the disclosing partner, this then arguably contradicts liberal discourses of multiple and/or fluid sexualities, which in turn troubles the participants identities as "good" people. Here we see a resonance with the study by McKinlay and Dunnett (1998) mentioned earlier, where a similarly delicate gun ownership identity negotiation in the context of contradictory social discourses on the topic. There is also a concurrent tension evident in the straight partners' accounts where a potential for risk to the disclosing partner is constructed. One aspect of which – seemingly contradictory to liberal discourses of sexuality - is a need for the participants to protect their partners' sexuality from unspecified danger. In this respect we can see the participants construct positions of "dual-victimising" by wider society, which is referred to in previous literature and is made visible in the current analysis (Buxton, 2001, 2004, 2005).

6.2.2 A question of knowledge

This discursive element is arguably pivotal in the construction of the participants' innocent identities as it was a novel emergence in the analysis and the accounts of knowing and not knowing were produced by the participants as inextricably linked to both the fields of victimhood and blame. The crucial point for the author being: if they 'knew' about their partners' hitherto undisclosed, albeit sometimes suspected, LGB identities, then their own claim to innocence is nullified, they are no longer unknowing victims, and by extension the blame for the experience may fall to them – in that there would be nobody to blame but themselves. The

participants balanced this potentially problematic knowing versus not knowing element discursively in variable, but yet consistent ways to justify a sophisticated, rational thinking, yet naïve position, which again is resonant with McKinlay and Dunnett (1998). The participants' accounts produced a varying spectrum of "not-knowing" ranging on a continuum from a shocked "had no idea" unknowing through a delicately balanced "suspicious" knowing, through thwarted attempts to know, and attempts to explicitly address suspicions. The analysis of their accounts extends Beattie and Doherty's (1995) discursive analysis of the intricacies and effort that eyewitness's to sectarian violence construct in accounts managing knowing and naïve positions simultaneously to protect their particular identities in this context – those of agentic informed thinker, but also victim, and moreover, blameless victim.

To this end also then, the analysis evidenced Sacks's (1984) notion of "doing being ordinary" is perhaps crucial – with participants meticulously constructing their mundane, routinised behaviour prior to the disclosure/discovery of their partner's apparently unknown non-heterosexuality. This is illustrative of Drew's (1998) "defensive detailing", where speakers do "moral work" by orienting to, and implicitly attempting to deflect attributions of blame to their own conduct through detailed descriptions of events. In the current study then, the participants' ordinariness is related to their naivete, in direct contrast to the knowingness of their partners. In these careful constructions of themselves as ordinary people, the participants not only create a consensual understanding with the listener of their prior unknowing of the disclosure – an ordinary person couldn't reasonably have been expected to know what was going on. There is also a message to the audience in the form of a warning that this could happen to anyone.

Furthermore, there is a question about the wider context in which the participants are "doing unknowing". This context is un-explicated by the participants

and accepted by the interviewer as a given, which makes relevant to this analysis the discursive approach to positioning theory taken by (Korobov, 2010), whose discursive study illustrates second order ways of positioning self and other, and the force of certain discursive actions which construct features of social identities. Korobov argues that a discursive psychological approach to positioning allows us to understand how people interpret the social meanings of the identities they talk up, and how they employ those meanings to position their own and others' identities in talk. The participants in this study positioned their talk within discourses of heterosexual monogamous relationship with taken for granted but unspoken rules of behaviour. In this way the participants not only define the range of the relevance of the context, but they also discursively make relevant their partners' LGB sexuality as an identity category, and their own identities as unknowing of this, which according to Edwards (1998, p.19) allows speakers to *"perform and manage various kinds of interactionally sensitive business*". This is evident in here where the participants do some nuanced discursive work around their unknowing – therefore innocent identity. The implication then being potentially - if they are not to blame that someone else must be.

6.2.3 Attributing Blame

As part of the identity work being done in the participants' talk - a third element of the discursive strand - the attribution of blame, was also negotiated in a variable and delicate way. In the analysis it emerged as problematic for the participants to attribute blame directly: visible in the many strands of accountability which were discursively performed. Given the extensive work put into attribution of blame to other(s), and if we accept a reading of the analysis as the participants' accounts operating according to taken for granted rules or codes of heterosexual monogamous relationship (described in Chapter 5), then the disclosing partners could be heard as

the transgressors in this situation. This is congruent with Drew (1998) who posits that accounts in which moral work is overt and explicit appear as generally produced in association with complaints about the behaviour of others. As only one disclosing partner had hinted at alternate sexuality prior to the relationship in question, the disclosing partners could be viewed as having been deceptive. A confusion in the participants' accounts appears to arise from the apparent lack of punishment by society for these transgressions. In fact, in the participants' accounts, the disclosing partners are discursively constructed as being rewarded for their behaviour, while the erstwhile victims, the participants, are punished. There is no one to hear their complaint, and they produce accounts of being overlooked or even punished by society, and having their pain disregarded which is resonant with, and extends, the thematic content of much of the non-discursive existing literature on the topic (Buxton, 2004; Buxton, 2006a; Buxton, 2006b; Buxton, 2006c; Buxton & Pinely, 2013; Grever, 2012; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Schwartz, 2012).

The current study develops existing discursive research on the topic (Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Wolkomir, 2009), and also extends the anecdotal accounts of straight partners in Buxton and Pinely (2013) by interrogating the language used by straight partners who find themselves in this "unscripted territory". The analysis makes visible the complexity of the work of their talk as they attempt to make sense of where accountability belongs in their experience, while simultaneously justifying their own innocence. The analysis offered here illustrates how the 'self-blaming' by participants referred to in existing literature (Buxton, 2004, 99,102,103,104; Buxton, 2006b, 53,57,65; Buxton, 2006c, 322; Buxton & Pinely, 2013; Grever, 2012, 71; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007, 191; Schwartz, 2012, 127) is performed in participants' accounts to both resist that identity and to place blame with both the disclosing partners and wider social communities.

A pervasive feature of these participants' discourses around blame then, is the construction of themselves as "blameless but being blamed". The analysis illustrates that they do much discursive work to avoid appearing biased, or somehow motivated to blame their partners' sexual identities directly, and their talk only directs blame in vague terms towards a wider society for seemingly ignoring their distress: again illustrative of Drew's (1998) "defensive detailing" as discussed in the preceding paragraph. Issues of blame and accountability are not typically performed then by overt attribution to *specific* others, but instead through apparently straightforward and common sense descriptions of the world. This extends other discursive investigations of attribution of accountability: for example Abell and Stokoe (1999), Edwards and Potter (1993), and MacMillan and Edwards (1999).

The participants in the current study particularly avoided much explicit blame of their partners' LGB sexuality, and instead can be heard to construct layered arguments and persuasions in their accounts to blame other behaviours such as deception. This sets up heterosexuality in the talk as something that can be taken for granted by people, and something that must be *'declared'* if not the case.

6.2.4 The influence of heteronormative discourses on participants' talk

The study also aimed to highlight the influence of ideology upon us all in the heteronormative expectations we construct our social lives with. Concomitant with the literature on heteronormative discourses examined in Chapter 2, this study argues that we appear to take these expectations for granted and assume them be true (Billig,1991) and this is reflected in this analysis. Utilising discourses of heteronormativity as a framework for the analysis has been instrumental in making visible here Kitzinger's (2005, p.255) argument that people generally are not actively "doing being heterosexual", but rather, as the participants in this study do, treat

heterosexuality as unremarkable and ordinary, and it is only incidentally displayed in their accounts. It is argued in the analysis that using this discursive framework suggests that heterosexual relationships may have *codes* or *rules* that are largely implicit and are difficult to categorise as they appear to flow from issues including, but not limited to, gender roles and expectations in heterosexual relationships, issues around transparency and monogamy as examples. This was not confined to the participants' talk alone, as the researcher in her role as interviewer also unproblematically and interactionally constructed this discourse with the participants.

The author contends that participants' talk about their relationship with their disclosing partner is then inextricably linked with issues of a contemporary liberal discourse about sexuality and freedom of choice, but also still mired in a heteronormative moral order – the *'closet'* of the title - with importance placed on normality (heterosexuality), and abnormality attributed to non-heterosexuality (Sedgwick, 2008). A tension between these and newer discourses of sexuality may be visible in the sensitivity by participants to being heard as homophobic (Speer & Potter, 2000). Viewing the issue in these terms may then be helpful to understanding the confusion, or hesitancy, in the participants' discourse around claiming a victim identity for themselves and attributing blame because they construct their partners as victims. This complicated entwining of discourse – the taken for granted versus the relatively new and unfamiliar is also useful for examining how the participants talk about the way wider communities receive them as straight partners. The discourses influencing that identity could be argued to have pushed these participants' talk to the edges of heteronormativity, from where they are having to "work up" an alternative heterosexual identity in a not dissimilar way to how Kitzinger (2005) explores non-heterosexuals negotiating or being *'othered'* by heterosexist discourses. One way of understanding this then is that these particular participants are potentially constructing themselves in their talk as being unwillingly linked with an "othered

sexual identity" by their relationship with a non-heterosexual person. This is also germane to what Coates (2013) terms "the overlooked identity" – a discursively produced "lesser" heterosexual identity – described by Coates as a heterosexual person not in a heterosexual monogamous relationship. This then could be argued to form a part of a multi-stranded and situated identity that the participants are heard to both work up and resist in their accounts.

This research then articulates a differently nuanced understanding of the complexities of constructing an innocent identity than that which was found in the existing literature. In particular with regard to the ,discursive work carried out by the participants in their *knowing versus unknowing* which suggests that a simple bifurcation of victimhood and blame or accountability does not adequately capture the complexity of participants' experiences. It could be argued that limitations arose in terms of the particularity of the sample: the fact that the participants in the focus groups were known to each other and having met previously to discuss this experience. However, it should be noted that these phenomena arose in participants' talk in both the individual interviews and the focus groups without explicit solicitation on the part of the researcher. There could be further limitations in terms of the researcher's gaze on this phenomenon which led to this reading being preferenced in the analysis. This and other methodological issues are discussed in the following sections.

6.3 Assessing the methodology

In terms of the methodology then, as discussed at length in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, the research was grounded in a constructionist epistemology and employed a methodology which utilised a DP weighted focus on the data combined

with a CDP focus on some of the discourses, repertoires and dilemmas utilised or invoked by the participants. Polkinghorne (2005, p.138) posits that qualitative inquiry is designed to study the "*experiential life of people*", and as such the methodology did not pre-empt the analysis and evolved in response to the data. The author considers that this methodology was one way of giving voice to a subordinate group without adopting a realist treatment of the data, as suggested by Sampson (1993). However, there is no claim being made that this epistemological approach is the "only" way to approach the topic. It is offered, as is the analysis, as one approach of many (Burr, 2003). However, concurrently the analysis strove to stay with its epistemological stance by avoiding what Mulkay (1981) termed "vassalage", that is to say, by not approaching the data as "truth" or ignoring the importance of analysing the discursive categorisations deployed by the participants.

In a similar vein Finlay (2002) posits that a discourse analyst must remain aware of, and explicit about their role in the analytic process. The researcher has attempted to hold these considerations closely though the process, explicating her interest, stance and participation in the data. The author suggests that social constructionist approach taken here has made visible some of the ways in which social organisation operates as a flexible set of constructions deployed in talk. An example of this - which is resonant with the work done by participants in the current study with heteronormative discourse - is Billig's (1992) interrogation of talk about the British royal family. He highlighted how people both reproduced and reconstructed complex contradictory notions about equality, privilege and the nation state in their accounts – creating "common-sense" talk about royalty which he argues perpetuates and legitimises the political status quo.

There are however challenges to a constructionist approach, discussed by Potter and Hepburn (2008), such as the discursive construction of the domain of

emotion, which the authors suggest has been historically treated as something "internal". Potter and Hepburn contend that in terms of emotion social constructionist research is constantly expanding. Indeed in the current analysis the author drew on the work of Edwards (1997, 1999) to show how notions of "anger" and "distress" were constructed as reactions in the participants talk. Work such as Edwards, arguably demonstrates DP's claim that it does not ignore psychology, but treats it as an interactional concern (Wiggins, 2017). Germane to that argument, a psychoanalytic critique of constructionist approaches by Chowdorow (1999) argues that they ignore the power of "feelings" and place over-emphasis on cultural meanings in terms of subjectivity. Chowdorow contends personal meaning is an external expression of internal psychic "realities". This argument however, is countered by Wetherell (2006) who suggests that psychology "needs an understanding of forms of order which are not cause-effect sequences, mindless correlations, prescriptive rules, mysterious dynamics, drives, etc., but which follow the structuring but agentic, organised but could be otherwise, inter-subjective and reflexive order of practice". Wetherell (2007) further posits that a major contribution of discourse research has been to demonstrate that everyday language use is relatively, and sometimes highly, ordered. To this end she suggests that that "psycho-discursive practices" (Wetherell, 2007, p.676) play a central role in the constitution of subjectivity and identity, leading to a different view of than posited by either the psycho-analytic approach or the more conversation analytic approach espoused by Schegloff (1997).

As detailed in Chapter 4 of this thesis a micro focus on the interactional business being conducted at the level of the talk, was shared with an interest in the more macro social and cultural meanings (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1998), and subject positions (Davies & Harre, 1990; Wetherell, 1998), and ideological dilemmas (Billig, 1991) upon which the participants drew in constructing and negotiating an identity of innocence post-disclosure. The author notes that

employing this combined analysis illustrates a constant and complex interplay of participants orienting to the topic at a local level of interaction while frequently drawing on or constructing discourses – mostly implicit - from a wider context. The author further contends that the nuanced constructions performed by the participants were rendered more visible by the use of this combined approach. Wiggins and Potter (2008) contend that a significant contribution of discursive work to social psychology is its ability to explicate the precise manner by which people articulate a complex set of positions that blend opposing or potentially problematic views.

The author acknowledges however that the methodology employed here may fall foul of a particular two sided critique in trying to encompass both interactional and ideological dimensions. To expand on that suggestion then: from an interactional DP perspective this combination of approach could be seen as potentially diluting the analysis with the addition of pre-formed cultural issues rather than staying with what is demonstrably revealed as relevant by the participants in their interaction (Schegloff, 1997, Stokoe & Hepburn, 2005). Then from the more ideological CDP standpoint, producing an underinformed, politically naïve reading that underplays the wider social context (Billig, 1999, Edley, 2001). The author acknowledges that either a singular DP or a CDP analysis may have yielded a deeper and broader analysis, addressing these potential criticisms. However, this modified method was grounded in previous similar approaches (Tileaga, 2005; Willott & Griffin, 1997), and the combined approach argued for by Wetherell (1998), who proposed that a combination of micro and macro focus leads to fuller analysis of data. Furthermore, given the lack of existing literature on the topic, the author contends that this method of analysis offers an exploratory insight into the various levels of complex and nuanced discursive work being done in the talk, and opens up the possibilities for further in-depth research into more singular discursive aspects.

In terms of further critique of the method, Wooffitt (2005) arguing for a conversation analysis approach to data, has suggested that interpretative repertoires are reductionist, as most discourse analysis work illustrate two and at the most three repertoires in a study. While the author does not disagree that to suggest that the repertoires identified in the analysis are the extent of possible readings of the data would be reductionist, that does not appear to be the case in the literature explored to inform this study, nor is that a claim of the current study. However, for the purposes of this study the terms discourse and interpretative repertoire were used interchangeably. The author contends that the focus of the research was not on whether they were one or the other, but rather an acknowledgement of their presence in the talk, and the possible influences of such as providing a context for the participants' talk as they create their understandings of their own experiences of being a straight partner in their talk-in-interaction. The interpretative repertoires identified in this study therefore provided a platform from which the participants locally managed their constructions of victimhood, unknowing and the management of accountability (Wetherell, 1998).

In keeping with a stated aim of the study which was to approach in an attitude of unknowing, the author was not seeking to identify particular discourses or interpretative repertoires. Instead those suggested in the analysis emerged from repeated engagement with the data. Neither was the author seeking to categorise the participants as "innocent" or otherwise: rather the methodological approach taken enabled the analysis to illustrate "*that* and *how* this identity is made relevant or ascribed to self or others" (Widdicombe, 1998, p.191). Wooffitt (2005) further warns against a slide to 'ascriptivism' where the existence of potential discourses is inferred from extracts of text without explication. The author recognises that all such discourses and repertoires discussed in this thesis are indeed interpretative, but it is

hoped that the combination of CDP with DP as a method may go some way to mitigating against this.

6.4 Assessing the method

An issue that is often raised in discourse analytic writing concerns the shortcomings of researcher generated data in qualitative interviews. The method described fully in Chapter 4 – has already attempted to address these problems as outlined by Potter & Hepburn (2005). In addition to those issues, Potter and Hepburn (2005, p.284) also argue that there is a sense of interviews as now being "*the natural way*" to do qualitative research and offer alternatives to this in their paper. This author would not argue that point, particularly with a topic where participants may unwilling or unable to talk frankly, then naturally occurring data would be more useful. Arguably however, naturally occurring data relies solely on the researcher's interpretation of what is observed or read to make meanings explicit. Interviews, on the other hand, give participants a direct opportunity to construct their own meanings in interaction with the interviewer/researcher (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). Finally, in the case of this study there was no viable alternative available to explore the topic qualitatively, barring the analysis of previous interview or anecdotal data as the online support group is a closed group.

In response to a potential argument that transcripts of an interview do not represent 'ordinary' conversation, and as such are not suitable for conversation analysis, Abell and Stokoe (1999) suggest that in an edited interview with Martin Bashir, Princess Diana '*does blaming'* in particular patterned and regular ways, employing devices and strategies that had been identified in other more '*everyday*' conversations. By inviting the participants to talk freely and without particular

questions in mind, the researcher avoided what Potter and Hepburn (2005, p.291) highlight as another issue with interviews *"flooding the interview with social science agenda and categories*", thereby enabling them to talk as naturally as permitted within the constraints of an interview situation.

6.4.1 The use of group interviews

With regards to the use of group as well as individual interviews, from the outset of the research there was no initial guarantee how much data it would be possible to collect so all offers of participation were gratefully accepted. Furthermore, as the research was being approached in an attitude of *'unknowing'* rather than any agenda to examine constructions of group and/or individual accounts, there did not appear to be a case to select one over the other. The author acknowledges that this is a potential limitation of the analysis, however it was outside the focus of the investigation and the scope of this study. With regard to potential differences between the two: while there was disagreement amongst the groups, it tended to be in the areas of how the participants were managing the difficult issues which arise in many relationship breakups: the negotiation of family relationships and financial issues. In the specific talk about the issue of the partner's disclosure or the discovery of non-heterosexuality, the group talk was consensual and corroborating. Therefore the researcher maintains a case for including both in the analysis. The consensual group talk is germane to Ritchie et al.'s (2013) suggestion that groups offer people the opportunity to refine their talk through discussion, and in hearing others' views.

The consensus may also be germane to Coates's (1996) study which concludes that women's group talk may function to develop a form of cooperative connectedness. This may also aid understanding of how the talk in the group interviews was more social – containing much more talk about topics other than the experience of being a straight partner, while the participants in the individual

interviews remained almost entirely task-focused. The analysis of the group extracts may also illustrate a confidence in talking about partners' behaviour in a group of peers where there is a likelihood of claim being bolstered by consensual formulation. These group constructions are also germane to the work of McKinlay and Dunnett (1998 p.50) who argue that constructing an identity is a *"collaborative exercise".*

6.4.2 Reliability and validity

This study was focussed on a particular and small sample of participants. However, the use of small "purposive samples" has been argued for previously by Korborov (2004, p. 187)) who argues that the value of doing a discursive analysis of a small "information rich" data set is that it empirically details the complexities involved for participants in constructing identities and either appropriating or resisting norms.

Gill (2000, citing Potter,1996), suggests four considerations for assessing the reliability and validity of a discourse analysis, one being that analytic credibility is judged by the reader on the evidence which emerges from the extracts which support the main arguments to produce a coherent and convincing explanation and if they wish to do so, to put forward alternative interpretations. Another consideration suggested is that the participants' understandings of the analysis will offer a useful check on validity. In line with a further suggestion that deviant cases be examined in detail, a range of participants' accounts were examined in the analysis of the three discursive strands argued to comprise the innocent identity. Although no one account contradicted another the author contends there was enough variation and difference in each extract chosen to argue that each one added to the depth and richness of the analysis. Finally, in terms of coherence Gill suggests building an analysis on insights gained from previous studies. To this end the researcher has drawn on the work of many different researchers who are all cited in the analysis. Terms and concepts from discursive psychology (Wiggins, 2017) were drawn on in an *'ecumenical'* and

flexible way, including but not limited to, rhetorical devices such as extreme case formulations, evaluations, disclaimers, membership categorisations, hedging, three part lists, vagueness, consensus and corroboration, and membership categorisation.

6.5 Limitations of the study

It is important to recognise the potential limits to the interpretations readers may make regarding these analyses, given that this is a particular sample talking about a particular topic at a particular time. The researcher has taken steps to guard against a narrow, or over-interpretation of these findings. First, the researcher has been transparent and detailed about the participants and the process of data collection, enabling the reader to be aware of some of the limitations which may arise from the particularity of these participants' experience. Second, in line with Gill (2000) deviant case analysis was considered which was an important check on the researcher forcing a singular interpretation on heterogenous data. Third, as Gill suggests, extensive data extracts were presented providing the reader with a means of corroborating, or otherwise, the researcher's analysis of the data.

Having highlighted some methodological limitations earlier in this chapter, which could be addressed in future research, the author further suggests that this study is also limited by its scope as a small scale, and unintentionally racially, ethnically and socio-economically homogenous undertaking, with six individual participants and seven group participants split between two groups – as outlined in Chapter 4. As such then, nothing has emerged from the study about the influences of possible alternative cultural discourses of race, ethnicity, or the influence of socio-economic issues on how people construct this experience, nor have potential differences between group interview constructions of the experience and individual

constructions of the experience been explored in any depth. Crucially, the scope of the thesis necessitated making choices about which discursive theme to focus on here, and as a result there is an unavoidable limitation of the analysis of the corpus of the data.

6.6 Implications for counselling psychology

Starks and Trinidad (2007) suggest that discourse analyses can be usefully used to understand how language and it's framing can be used in clinical settings and beyond to policy making, thus making it relevant to counselling psychology as a methodology. Initially, the first implication for the field of counselling psychology, then, is that the findings present one way of understanding peoples' complex and nuanced experiences as straight partners which the author hopes will aid the development of therapeutic interventions which are personally tailored to the straight partner. The tension in the study between a micro and macro approach to the analysis should not be alien to counselling psychologists who have a focus on the contexts of clients' experiences and the tensions inherent there (Cooper & McLeod, 2011; Parritt, 2016). As this is a small study addressing only one of many possible available identities for the participants, there is therefore good cause for continued enquiry into other aspects of the topic. Sciarra (1999) argues that the connection of social science to social purpose is particularly relevant to counselling psychology. To that end then, in the current study the researcher adopted what Sciarra (1999) describes as an "expert versus learner" role as a psychologist-researcher, in the sense that the role of researcher gave access to the field, but the "expert" role was exchanged with the participants in a collaborative pursuit of the participants' meaning-making constructions of their experience, with an explicit intention of giving free voice to the participants on the topic. The study has explored how the participants construct

a complex, multi-stranded identity as innocent in the context of their experience as straight partners - giving them a voice - which is resonant with Hanley, Steffen and O'Hara's (2106) claim that counselling psychology research should attempt to inform professional practice and give a voice to those who do not have one of their own.

The second implication, which emerged from the analysis is the influence of dominant pervasive discourses on peoples' constructions of reality which extends the literature reviewed for this study (Braun, 2000; Broad, 2011; Butler, 1990; Kitzinger, 2005; Sedgwick, 2008; Spargo,1999; Swan & Benack, 2012; Wolkomir, 2009). In the case of this study seemingly "invisible" discourses with implicit "rules" around a theme of heteronormative assumptions which were deployed and accepted by both the researcher and the participants in the interviews to construct a reality – only emerging in the analysis. This highlights a need for counselling psychologists as practitioners and as researchers to be aware of how regularly this may be unwittingly deployed in therapeutic talk, both by clients and by themselves, and how a consequence of this can be the perpetuation of, rather than a challenging of heteronormative discourses - and to hold the micro aspects of talk in balance with the macro contexts within which talk occurs. One reading of Balick (2010) then would appear to suggest there are tensions inherent in the meeting of old and new discourses of sexuality. From this the author suggests that practitioners should be wary of self-consciously attempting to simply replace heterosexist discourses with post-modern or queer theory discourses which may simply replicate the prizing of one over the other. Balick instead suggests replacing a more binary notion of *'fixed* 'or '*fluid'* sexuality with a moment by moment awareness of what is being co-created between the speaker and hearer and the possible influences on both. This study then highlights once again the need for counselling psychologists and all therapeutic practitioners to remain engaged with the tensions and implications of the language we use (Lago & Smith,

2010), and to remain engaged with a reflective practice to keep an awareness of the discourses and everyday ideologies that influence us (Donati, 2016).

This then leads to the third and arguably novel implication of the study which is offered in terms of a suggestion for further research. The literature reviewed, and the analysis conducted here, demonstrate the participants' claims to be overlooked and unheard, and even constructing themselves as blamed for their distress. One possible way of understanding that is while as a society, and as a profession, we might like to believe that more liberal or fluid discourses around sexuality and acceptance are now a 'norm' the analysis in fact highlights an implicit tentative quality in these discourses which may imply they currently demand our full attention and concentration. A similar tentative approach to language is illustrated by Lago and Smith (2010, p.1) who coming from a perspective *"that anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice is both ethical practice and best practice"* suggest people fear having their talk policed for evidence of discrimination towards or oppression of minorities. Similarly to these participants then, we have as yet, neither as a profession nor as a society, developed a confident language around the topic of straight partners' which means for straight partners a silence around their experience from which they struggle to make meanings.

6.7 Suggestions for future research

As mentioned in the previous section, the scope and methodological approach of this thesis have meant that a number of potential discursive themes identified within the corpus of data have not been explored. Specifically, it may have been interesting to consider the construction of accountability in its own right, or to examine grief or loss talk in the context of a partner's disclosure, or indeed to explore the discursive

construction of recovery from the experience which for many of the participants was reported as being a motivation to engage with the research, along with a desire to perhaps be helpful to other people going through the same experience. To this end a longitudinal study may illuminate changing constructions or evolving discourses at work in straight partners' talk.

There were many areas with the existing corpus of data that could be fruitfully analysed for further studies, including but not limited to, the participants' constructions of recovery from this experience, constructions of anger or grief and the effects of the experience on the participants' own sexuality and future relationships. The findings from the study also highlight a need for further interrogation of, and research into, the heteronormative discourses which pervaded these participants' accounts. This could either be in the form of further exploration of the interplay between possible ideological dilemmas and the interactional business performed by the participants, or the pervading discourses could be examined through a more macro lens of analysis. For instance, Lago and Smith (2010), referencing discrimination and marginalisation, suggest exploring how people draw on different discourses at different times and the often subtle and implicit effects of the ideologies that are constructed there. To clarify: conduct research on the topic with people who do not share this experience by examining their constructions of 'straight partner' and heteronormative influences. In terms of the objectives of the current study this would have particular relevance for counselling psychologists and other therapeutic practitioners as it could provide some fruitful insight into the discourses which inform people who are observers of, or work with, the client group.

Although not specifically addressed in this study, one difference noted by Buxton (1994) between male and female disclosing spouses, which was replicated in the accounts of the three male participants in the current study, was that more

lesbian and bisexual wives appeared to have already formed a same-sex relationship when they disclosed to their spouses. This would seem to imply that gendered identity construction of straight partners could also be a topic of further investigation.

6.8 Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate the usefulness of being willing to explore the constructive and performative aspects of language. Here, the complexities and possible tensions in the construction of an *'innocent'* identity as a straight partner, and the way in which these participants manage and negotiate this, has been the focus of analytic attention. Through the close examination of occasioned talk about the issue at stake, some of the ways in which people may manage these issues have been identified. By focusing on how an identity of innocence is linguistically constructed, the author suggests that this is other than an internal construct which resides within the individual psyche of the participants. Instead the study of the participants' talk highlights the complex, contextual, and flexible nature of identity in being a straight partner and also illustrates some of the wider ideological discourses that influence these constructions. It is hoped that this study may provide one alternative way, for both the interested reader and counselling psychology as a profession, of understanding this experience.

6.9 Reflective conclusion

This thesis did not want to end – I chased it, corralled it, wrestled it to the floor – literally in some cases - and bit by bit edged it to this conclusion. While discussing this problem of finishing with my Director of studies, he made the very wise observation that perhaps somehow in finishing I was concerned that I was staking a claim to it *"being done".* I agree with his observation, and so although I have reached a necessary conclusion to this study, this topic is not *'done'* in the sense that there is nothing further to be said, nor that is there any claim that what has been said here couldn't be said differently and in many other ways.

I have learned from this endeavor a value in listening carefully to the words people use and how they use them, as opposed to immediately searching for meaning "in" the words. It has also given me pause to consider the many discourses which inform my own professional practice, including *'invisible'* or taken for granted discourses which I may reproduce in my own talk. This extends beyond the current study to other groups of people who may be falling "between the cracks" of the literature, because they are not the immediate or apparent focus of either public or professional concern and whose own unique experiences are neglected.

I have learned a lot about how the experience of being a straight partner can be bound up with living with some of the same difficulties that face disclosing partners, but with unique elements of distress. Crucially too, the participants in this study have illuminated for me a tension that is perhaps inherent in any social justice issue: when we cast a spotlight on an issue of injustice – such as LGB issues referred to in this thesis - and attempt to redress that injustice: as our discourse begins to alter, we may inadvertently cast a shadow over other groups of people both with the available

discourses and perhaps as potently with the silences. Perhaps this is unavoidable, but at the very least as counselling psychologists and human beings, we need to hold this in awareness and be alert to the inherent tensions of the intersections of changing discourses. The shadow of the *'closet'* of the title then is perhaps two-fold: it does not just encompass the implications of being a straight partner, but also the implications for meaning-making in a shadow cast by wider society whose discourses cannot yet properly consider their unique experience. The final thought then is for these participants and my sincere wish that this study will in some small way aid a sharing of the spotlight on their experience as straight partners.

"There is a certain amount of kindness, just as there is a certain amount of light," he continued in measured tones. "We cast a shadow on something wherever we stand, and it is no good moving from place to place to save things; because the shadow always follows. Choose a place where you won't do harm--yes, choose a place where you won't do very much harm, and stand in it for all you are worth, facing the sunshine."

EM Forster A room with a view Chapter 15.

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Appendix 1

Ethics Application Ref: PSYC 16/ 216 - Final Approval
Jan Harrison
Mon 13/06/2016, 13:40Rubian Lyons (Research Student);Amanda Holmes;Paul Dickerson

Dear Rubian,

Ethics Application

Applicant: Rubian Lyons

Title: Living in the shadow of the closet: a discourse analysis of straight spouses' constructions of life after a partner's disclosure as lesbian, gay or bisexual

Reference: PSYC 16/ 216

Department: Psychology

Many thanks for your response and the amended documents. Under the procedures agreed by the University Ethics Committee I am pleased to advise you that your Department has confirmed that all conditions for approval of this project have now been met. We do not require anything further in relation to this application.

Comment:

We understand that DBS clearance would not be required for this research. However, if DBS is required for any further studies, you would need to either register your current DBS on the online checking service or have your DBS processed through Roehampton HR. Please let us know if this happens as there may also be amendments required for your application.

Please note that on a standalone page or appendix the following phrase should be included in your thesis:

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference PSYC 16/ 216 in the Department of Psychology and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 13.06.16.

Please Note:

- **This email confirms that all conditions have been met and thus confirms final ethics approval.**
- **University of Roehampton ethics approval will always be subject to compliance with the University policies and procedures applying at the time when the work takes place. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are familiar and compliant with all such policies and procedures when undertaking your research.**
- **Please advise us if there are any changes to the research during the life of the project. Minor changes can be advised using the Minor Amendments Form on the Ethics Website, but substantial changes may require a new application to be submitted.**

Many thanks,

Jan

Jan Harrison
Ethics Officer

Research Office
University of Roehampton | London | SW15 5PJ

jan.harrison@roehampton.ac.uk| www.roehampton.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0) 20 8392 5785

Appendix 2

From:
Date: Sun, Nov 8, 2015 at 6:51 PM
Subject: Re: Research Project
To: Ruby Lyons

Hi Ruby

That's now much clearer thank you and on that basis I'd have no trouble canvassing for some members to take part when the time comes. One thing to raise which you may want to consider before we ask for volunteers - our group has a smaller but significant number of straight men with lesbian partners and an even smaller but growing number of exclusively straight women (at the moment) with transgender partners.

If these would confuse your study parameters, you'd need to make clear if it was only straight women with gay partners you were seeking - to avoid confusion. There are obviously many common areas of experience between all members, but also important differences - for example the straight men are often very traumatised if the split means they lose daily contact with their often quite young children - this can be physically painful for them and hugely upsetting.

We would totally agree it's a badly neglected area that health professionals do not understand well or even fully empathise with in some cases and so this will encourage people to want to help you - as will a convenient location for them to meet - which might be easier to determine once we know who is offering to help as we have members all over the UK and indeed some much further afield!

Let me know when you're ready for the next step.

University of Roehampton London

Appendix 3

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

To date it appears as if the experience of being a person who has a partner or spouse disclose as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) within a heterosexually intentioned relationship has received little attention either socially or academically. As a result, health professionals, including counselling psychologists, still have a limited understanding of this experience and how to help people who are affected by this experience.

This study has been designed to try and explore how the people affected make sense of their lives following disclosure by a spouse or partner as LGB by studying the way that they talk about their lives and relationships following these disclosures. The research asks the question: **How do straight people in heterosexually intentioned relationships in the United Kingdom construct their lives following the disclosure by their partner of gay, lesbian or bisexual sexuality?**

What participation involves:

- To take part in this study, you need to be over the age of 18.
- You must have been married to, or in long-term heterosexually intentioned relationship with a partner, prior to your partner coming out as LGB.
- You must be a member of the support group and have been a member for at least two months.
- You should feel able to talk about your experience without emotional costs to yourself that may be unmanageable for you.
- You must be willing to take part in a group discussion with two or three other support group members which will last approximately 1.5 hours and which will be audio recorded. Alternatively, you should be willing to be interviewed individually by the researcher on the same topic for approximately one hour, also audio-recorded. You may be invited to be re-interviewed at a later date, or to take part in additional group discussion.
- Approximately twenty four people in total will be interviewed for this research either as part of a small discussion group three/four people or individually.

- Participation in this research is voluntary and there is no compulsion to participate, and it has no bearing on your group membership, whether you decline to participate, or subsequently withdraw.

Venue for participation

To be confirmed

Risks and Benefits:

Speaking about your partner's disclosure may be an emotionally challenging experience and so, in considering your participation, please do also consider how this might affect you.

Taking part in this research will help to contribute towards a greater understanding of this phenomenon which appears to be relatively unspoken about, clinically, academically and socially. Participation may also enable more open and varied discourses about this experience to be heard, and may help to sensitise counsellors and therapists to the unique and complex issues of people affected. It may be an empowering experience for you to have your opinions and feelings documented, and it is hoped that the study's findings might have a meaningful impact on other individuals going through similar experiences but having not yet sought support in a group.

There will be no financial incentives for participation.

Possible Reasons for Exclusion:

If the researcher identifies that there are significant risk factors involved in your partaking in this research, it may not at this stage, be appropriate for you to participate in this study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Your identity will be protected at all times and any information you share will be treated and stored confidentially. However, if you disclose a desire to harm yourself or another, it will be necessary for the researcher to inform your support group leader so that further support can be provided to you. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and wish to discuss these, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Many thanks,
Ruby

Director of Studies
Name: Dr. Paul Dickerson
Department of Psychology,
University of Roehampton,

Whitelands College,
Holybourne Avenue,
London SW15 4JD
Email: p.dickerson@roehampton.ac.uk

Investigator
Name: Ruby Lyons
Programme of Study: Counselling Psychology Doctorate
Address: Department of Psychology,
University of Roehampton,
Whitelands College,
Holybourne Avenue,
London SW15 4JD
Email: lyonsr1@roehampton.ac.uk

University of Roehampton London

Appendix 4

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Living in the shadow of the closet: a discourse analysis of straight partners' constructions of life after a partner's disclosure as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:

.

This study has been designed to try and explore how the people affected make sense of their lives following disclosure by a spouse or partner as LGB by studying the way that they talk about their lives and relationships following these disclosures. The research asks the question: **How do straight people in heterosexually intentioned relationships in the United Kingdom construct their lives following the disclosure by their partner of gay, lesbian or bisexual sexuality?**

Participation involves taking part in a small group discussion of three or four people on the topic above for approximately one and a half hours. You may also be asked to re-interview at a later date. If you consent, you will be asked to complete a new participant consent form at that point. You are welcome to discuss whatever aspects of the topic you wish. I will provide prompts if required, but I am interested in your whole experience of being a straight partner and what that implies for you.

Researcher's Name: Ruby Lyons
Department: Psychology
University Address: University of Roehampton,
Whitelands College,
Holybourne Avenue, London
Postcode: SW15 4JD
Email: lyonsr1@roehampton.ac.uk
Telephone: 07960435553

Consent Statement:

I agree to voluntarily participate in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason by providing my participant ID number (see debrief), although if I do so, I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. Withdrawal from the research will not affect my

support group membership in any way. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy. However, if I disclose a risk of serious harm to myself or others, appropriate action may need to be taken in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society.

I have read the participant information form ☐

I am over 18 years of age ☐

I agree to the audio-recording of this interview ☐

Name ……..

Signature ……

Date ……

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

Director of Studies:
Name: Dr. Paul Dickerson
Department of Psychology,
University of Roehampton,
Whitelands College,
Holybourne Avenue,
London SW15 4JD

Email: p.dickerson@roehampton.ac.uk
0208 392 3741

Head of Department:
Name: Dr. Diane Bray
Department of Psychology,
University of Roehampton,
Whitelands College,
Holybourne Avenue,
London SW15 4JD

Email: d.bray@roehampton.ac.uk
0208 392 3741

University of Roehampton London

Appendix 5

DEBRIEFING FORM

This study has been designed to try and explore how the people affected make sense of their lives following disclosure by a spouse or partner as LGB by studying the way that they talk about their lives and relationships following these disclosures. The research asks the question: **How do straight people in heterosexually intentioned relationships in the United Kingdom construct their lives following the disclosure by their partner of gay, lesbian or bisexual sexuality?**

Thank you very much for your participation!

ID number:

If you have any questions regarding this study or If you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact the investigator with the ID number above. The data may still be used/ published in an aggregate form. Withdrawal from the study will not affect your membership of the support group.

Ruby Lyons
lyonsr1@roehampton.ac.uk
Holybourne Avenue
Department of Psychology
University of Roehampton
London SW15 4JD
07960435553

There may be a possibility that thinking and talking about your experience will evoke some distressing feelings. If this occurs, you can contact your support group, or please contact the investigator who can signpost you to some sources of support.

.

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies). However, if you

would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

Director of Studies Contact Details:
Details:
Dr. Paul Dickerson

Holybourne Avenue
Department of Psychology
University of Roehampton
London SW15 4JD
p.dickerson@roehampton.ac.uk
0208 392 3741

Head of Department Contact

Dr. Diane Bray

Holybourne Avenue
Department of Psychology
University of Roehampton
London SW15 4JD
d.bray@roehampton.ac.uk
0208 392 3741

University of Roehampton London

APPENDIX 6

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION (CREST)
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

DATA STORAGE AND PROTECTION PROCEDURES

Sources

These procedures are informed by, and consistent with, the following sources:

- Roehampton *University Data Protection Policy*, University of Roehampton, May 2010 (revised).
- *Ethical Guidelines for Researching Counselling and Psychotherapy*, British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2004.
- *Encrypting Confidential Data using Windows XP*, Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Guidelines, Counselling Unit, University of Strathclyde (available via Google Group).
- *Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants*, British Psychological Society (accessed Sept. 2008).
- Personal communications with Ralph Weedon, Data Protection Officer, University of Strathclyde

Responsibilities

- The Chief Investigator has overall responsibility to ensure that the appropriate data storage and protection guidelines are followed.

Non-anonymised/personal data

- Non-anonymised (or 'personal') data refers to any form of documentation or media – electronic or otherwise – in which an individual is identifiable. This includes, but is not limited to:
    - signed consent forms
    - client identity forms (including DOB, GP details, gender etc)
    - video recordings

  Note: even if no name or other obvious data is involved that would identify an individual, data such as date of birth, student matriculation number, national insurance number can be 'triangulated', perhaps with other data a third party has acquired, in such as way as to effectively identify someone. Anything that can be used in this way is therefore to be considered personal data.
- Collection of non-anonymised data will be kept to a minimum, and will only be obtained where it is ethically necessary (as in the case of signed consent forms), or where it clearly adds to the scientific value of a project (for instance, the video recording of counselling sessions).
- Non-anonymised data will be kept for ten years.
- All non-anonymised data will be clearly labelled with a date at which it should be destroyed.
- Non-anonymised data will be destroyed in a way which ensures that the data cannot be recovered in any way.

- Non-anonymised data will be kept physically and/or electronically separate from related anonymised data so that links can not be made between the two sets of data.
- Non-electronic personal data, such as tape recordings and signed consent forms, should be kept in a locked and secure location at all times, and, wherever possible, at the University of Roehampton.
- Electronic personal data will be encrypted and should always be kept on a password protected storage device: wherever possible a PC or network drive located at the University of Roehampton.
- Personal data should not be kept on – or transferred to – laptops, USB sticks, CDs or other mobile/portable devices unless absolutely necessary. As soon as such data is transferred to a secure University location, it must be removed from the portable device such that it cannot be recovered in any way.
- *Should it be necessary to transfer personal data from person to person, this should be done in a secure manner (i.e., by hand or by recorded delivery), always separate from any anonymised data. Any posted materials should be marked 'private and confidential' and sent recorded delivery.*
- For the duration of a study, non-anonymised data may, if absolutely necessary, be stored (in the manner identified above) by investigators other than the Chief Investigator (for instance, where a student is analysing video tapes of counselling sessions). However, on completion of the write-up of the research, all non-anonymised data will be returned to the Chief Investigator for storage, and any copies destroyed.

Anonymised data

- Anonymised data refers to any form of documentation or media – electronic or otherwise – in which an individual is in no way identifiable. This includes, but is not limited to:
    - SPSS spreadsheets in which identifying characteristics (such as age) are not recorded
    - completed questionnaires: qualitative or quantitative
- Anonymised data may be kept for an unlimited period, and may be used for subsequent research projects and data analyses at the discretion of the Chief Investigator (provided that this is made explicit to participants in consent forms).
- Non-electronic anonymised data will be kept in a locked and secure location at all times, ideally at the University of Roehampton.
- Electronic anonymised data may be stored electronically. This should always be to the highest possible standard of confidentiality: for instance, storage in an encrypted folder. It may also be kept on a password protected storage device, ideally at the University of Roehampton and, wherever possible, will be encrypted. Transfer and storage on portable/mobile devices (such as USB pens) should be kept to a minimum.
- Transfer of anonymised data should be conducted to the highest standards of confidentiality, always separate from any non-anonymised data. Any posted materials should be marked 'private and confidential.' If anonymised data is transferred via email, it should be transferred by the receiver to an encrypted portion of a hard disk as soon as possible, and both sender and receiver should hard delete the email/attachments from their email server.

- For the duration of a study, anonymised data may be stored (in the manner identified above) by investigators other than the Chief Investigator. However, on completion of the write-up of the research, all anonymised data will be returned to the Chief Investigator for storage, and any copies destroyed.

Partially anonymised data (also known as Pseudo-anonymised data)

- This section refers to any form of documentation or media – electronic or otherwise – in which it is highly unlikely that research participants can be identified, but in which the possibility of triangulation exists. This may include, but is not limited to:
    - audio recordings

  Note, if such media includes clearly identifying content (for instance, an interviewee reveals their name or that of their husband on an audio recording), then it will be treated as non-anonymised data until those identifying characteristics are removed.
- Wherever possible, partially anonymised (and non-anonymised) data should be scrutinised and all identifying details should be deleted/erased (for instance, identifying features on transcripts, such as names of partners, should be deleted or blacked out).
- Where all identifying details of partially anonymised data have been deleted/erased, this data will be treated as anonymised data, and subjected to the same procedures as above.
- In instances where partially anonymised data can not be fully anonymised (for instance, audio recordings in which the participant may be identifiable from their voice), this data will be kept for ten years, and will be stored according to the protocols for non-anonymised data.
- Within this ten year period, partially anonymised data may be used for subsequent research projects and data analyses at the discretion of the Chief Investigator (provided that this is made explicit to participants in consent forms).

The eight general principles of the data protection act, 1998

- Personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully (with specific requirements regarding sensitive personal data).
- Personal data shall be obtained only for one or more specified and lawful purposes, and shall not be further processed in any manner incompatible with that purpose or those purposes.
- Personal data shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose or purposes for which they are processed.
- Personal data shall be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date.
- Personal data processed for any purpose or purposes shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes.
- Personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects.
- Appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data and against loss or destruction of, or damage to, personal data.

- Personal data shall not be transferred to a country or territory outside the European Economic Area, unless that country or territory ensures an adequate level of protection for the rights and freedoms of data subjects in relation to the processing of personal data.

Appendix 7

Transcription key:

(.)	A micro pause less than a second
(..)	Slightly longer pause – two seconds – number of dots indicate approximate length of pause in seconds
↑↓	Upward arrow indicates a rising pitch in talk, downward arrow indicates a falling pitch
Underlined	Emphasised word or part of word
CAPITALS	Talk noticeably louder than surrounding talk
°quiet talk°	Degree symbol enclose word or talk noticeably quieter than surrounding talk
talk=talk	equal sign indicates latched talk, where there is no noticeable gap or there is an overlap of words
"reported"	Double quotation marks indicate reported speech or thought
→/←	Right and left arrows indicate drawn out beginning or ending of word
(hh)	Denotes audible inbreath/inhale
(.hh)	Denotes audible outbreath/exhale
[points at..]	Contains details of features that have not been transcribed
#	Indicates a 'creaky' perhaps distressed quality to talk
(pseudonym)	Curved single brackets indicate anonymised information or unclear talk – specified in each instance
?	Indicates a question being asked with a rising inflection